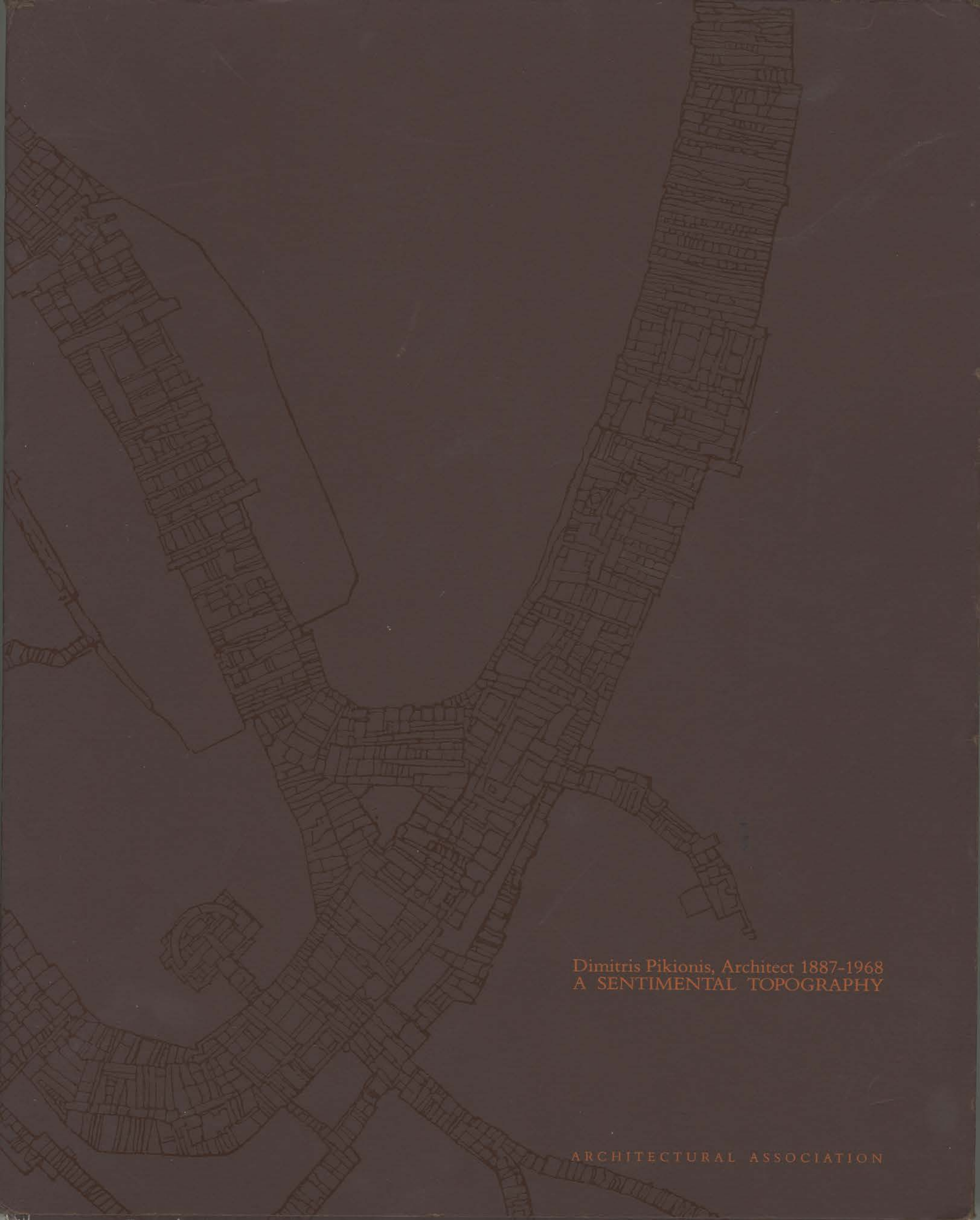
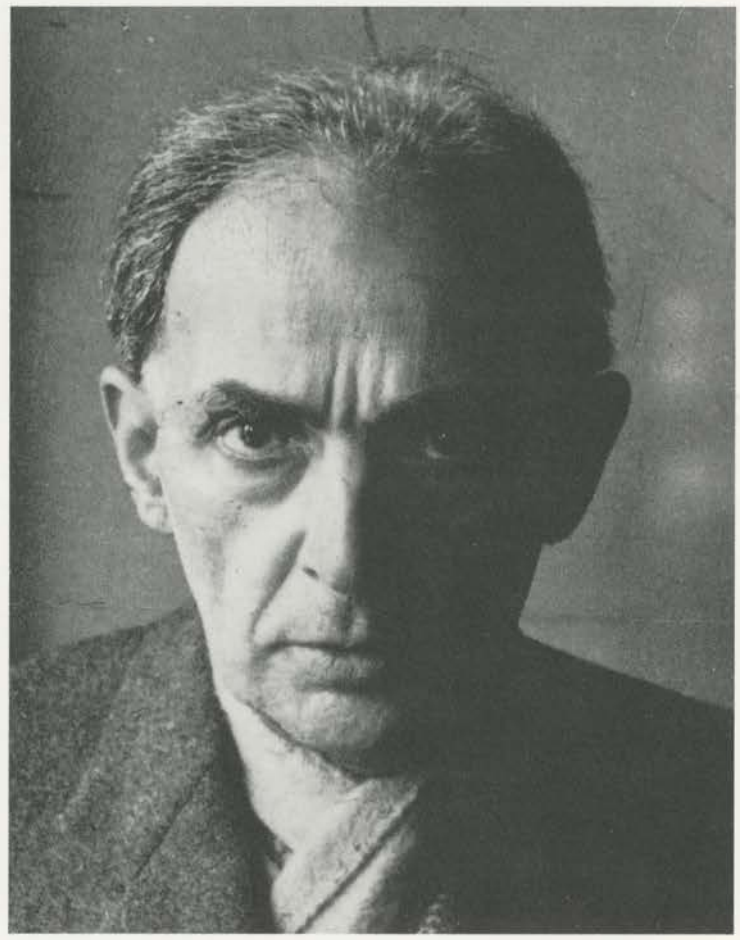


Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968
A SENTIMENTAL TOPOGRAPHY

ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION

Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968
A SENTIMENTAL TOPOGRAPHY

ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION LONDON



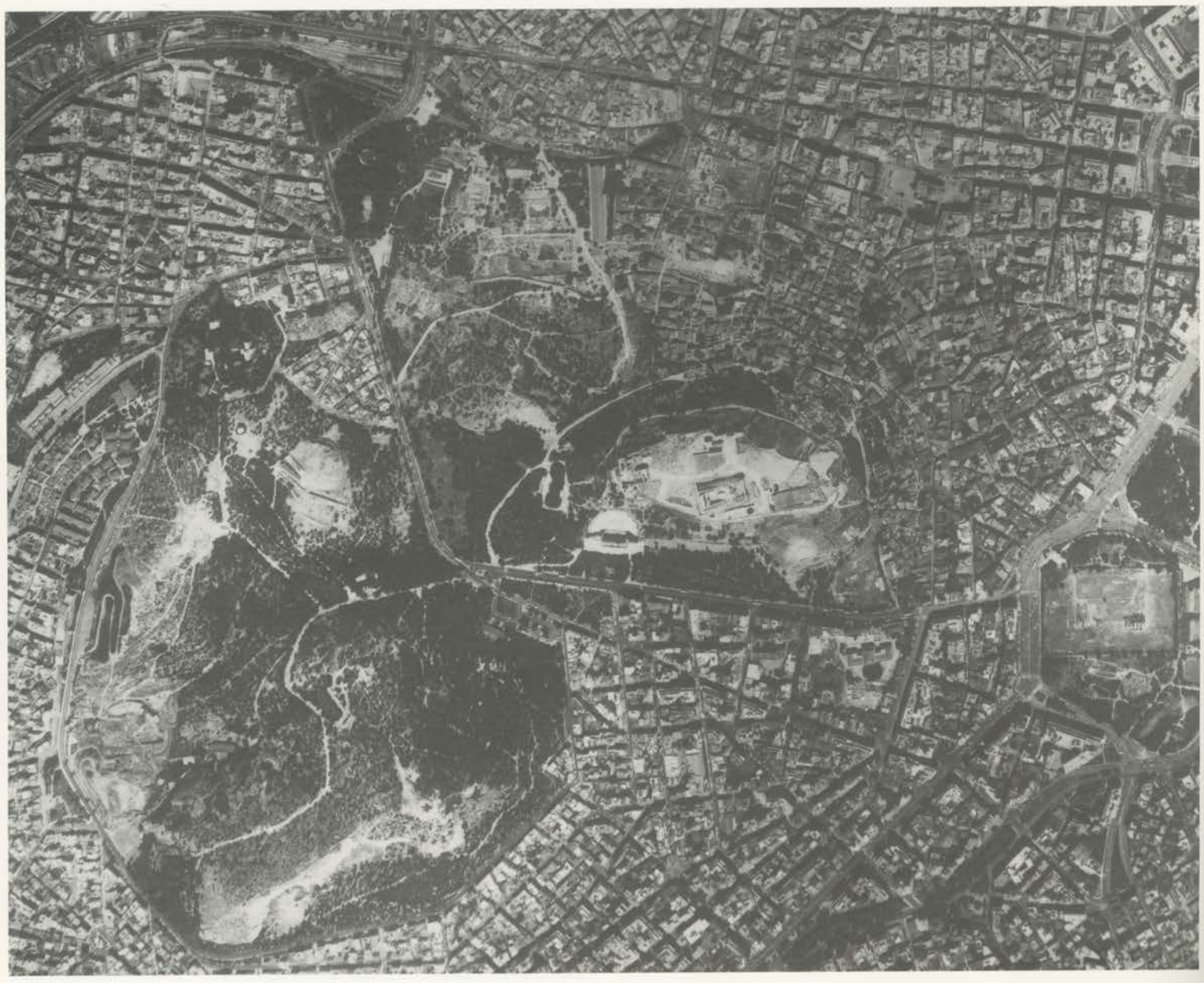
Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968
A SENTIMENTAL TOPOGRAPHY

CONTENTS

FOREWORD *Kosta Liaska*
President of the Technical Chamber of Greece, Athens 5
FOR DIMITRIS PIKIONIS *Kenneth Frampton* 6
DIMITRIS PIKIONIS: ELABORATION AND IMPROVISATION *Dimitris Antonakakis* 10
DIMITRIS PIKIONIS IN CONTEXT *Savas Condaratos* 18
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES *Dimitris Pikionis* 34
SELECTED PROJECTS 1923-65 38
DIMITRIS PIKIONIS *Alison and Peter Smithson* 65
A SENTIMENTAL TOPOGRAPHY *Dimitris Pikionis* 68
LANDSCAPING THE ATHENS ACROPOLIS 70
A Photographic Essay by *Hélène Binet*
With texts by *Agnis Pikionis* 72
Dimitris Antonakakis 90
Thalis Argyropolous 93
CHRONOLOGY 1887-1968 98
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 99
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 100

Cover:
Acropolis landscaping, 1951-7, road and footpath study

Opposite:
Pikionis circa 1955



Aerial view of central Athens showing Pikionis' landscaping of the area around the Acropolis and Philopappou Hill.

FOREWORD

KOSTA LIASKA

An exhibition and a publication of the work of Dimitris Pikionis remains a cultural event of great importance. His architectural achievements, contributions to Greek thought and sensibility, devotion to painting, and career as a great teacher are among those human creations which surpass their own particular era and social frame to become part of their country's cultural heritage, addressing in this sense architects and creative intellects everywhere. Thus an exhibition of Pikionis' work in London provides an opportunity to validate the humanitarian ideals which inspired it.

The values which pervade Pikionis' work are now widely accepted: his love and respect for nature and its relationship to human creation; and study of Greek popular traditions as part of the foundation of a nation travelling through the past and aiming at its future.

He was the beloved teacher of a whole generation, inspiring a great number of intellectuals. His work and philosophical thoughts unfolded during the most agitated period of recent Greek history. During this period there was an attempt, which evolved in parallel with the influential current of the Modern Movement, to transform the face of contemporary Greek art and architecture. The reforms faced a multitude of ideological problems, including the overwhelming burden of ancient Greek architecture via the nineteenth-century Neo-Classical movement; the flourishing example of existing, popular anonymous creations; and the prevailing logic of employing serious scientific study as the basis of creative search.

In this context Dimitris Pikionis' tortuous process of acquiring a self-knowledge of 'Greekness' bequeathed to us works which evoke a feeling of 'immortality' that we would like to remain with us forever.

Finally, an exhibition of the work of Dimitris Pikionis has a profound educational character for young people everywhere, as indicated by his 'Autobiographical Notes', in which he stated: 'Discard individual will and descend into the trough of obedience. This, and this alone, will grant you true freedom. Do not slacken or idle, for it is written that we may eventually be forgiven for not having been able to accomplish something, but never forgiven for not having tried.'

Kosta Liaska is the President of the Technical Chamber of Greece.
The Architectural Association is particularly grateful to the Technical Chamber of Greece for their financial support.

-Κάθε έκθεση του έργου του Δημήτρη Πικιώνη είναι ένα πολιτιστικό γεγονός μεγάλης σημασίας. Γιατί το αρχιτεκτονικό έργο του Πολιτικού Μηχανικού Δημήτρη Πικιώνη, το έργο του Ζωγράφου Δημήτρη Πικιώνη, το έργο του στοχαστή, του ακαδημαϊκού δάσκαλου, του μελετητή, ανήκουν σε εκείνες τις ανθρώπινες δημιουργίες που ξεπερνούν το χρονικό και κοινωνικό πλαίσιο μέσα στο οποίο πραγματοποιήθηκαν και γίνονται κομμάτι της πολιτιστικής κληρονομιάς του τόπου τους. Με αυτή την έννοια το έργο του Δημήτρη Πικιώνη "ανήκει" και απευθύνεται σε κάθε αρχιτέκτονα, σε κάθε πνευματικό δημιουργό, σε κάθε άνθρωπο. Μια έκθεση λοιπόν του έργου του έξω από το γεωγραφικά όρια της χώρας στην οποία δημιούργησε είναι μια ευκαιρία επαλήθευσης των ουμανιστικών ιδανικών που το διαπνέουν.

-Σήμερα δεν μας ενδιαφέρει να αποδείξουμε άν τα έργα του είναι αριστουργήματα ή αν ανήκουν στην πρωτοπορεία της εποχής τους. Σήμερα οι αξίες που διαπερνούν και πηγάζουν το έργο του είναι πανανθρώπινες κατακτήσεις. Η φύση που τόσο αγάπησε και η σχέση της με την ανθρώπινη δημιουργία, η λαϊκή παράδοση που μελέτησε σαν απαραίτητο υπόβαθρο της πολιτιστικής ταυτότητας ενός λαού, η αρχιτεκτονική δημιουργία την οποία υπηρέτησε σαν μια διαδικασία που περνά βασανιστικά μέσα από το παρελθόν και στοχεύει στο μέλλον ενός τόπου.

-Ο Δημήτρης Πικιώνης υπήρξε ο αγαπημένος και εμπνευσμένος δάσκαλος μιας ολόκληρης γενιάς αρχιτεκτόνων μηχανικών και ενός ολόκληρου κύκλου πνευματικών ανθρώπων. Το έργο του και ο φιλοσοφικός του στοχασμός ανελίχθηκαν σε πολύ ταραγμένες εποχές της πιό πρόσφατης ελληνικής ιστορίας. Είναι η εποχή που η πρωτοπορεία των ελλήνων αρχιτεκτόνων και δημιουργών προσπαθεί να διαμορφώσει το σύγχρονο ελληνικό πρόσωπο της αρχιτεκτονικής και της τέχνης γενικότερα. Το κίνημα αυτό, εξελισσόμενο παράλληλα με τα μεγάλα ρεύματα του μοντέρνου κινήματος, είχε μπροστά του πολλά και ποκίλλα ιδεολογικά προβλήματα να αντιμετωπίσει. Από την μιά μεριά το υπέροχο και αβάσταχτο βάρος της αρχαίας ελληνικής κληρονομιάς που βρήκε στη χώρα μας πρόσφορο έδαφος μέσω του νεοκλασικού κινήματος, και από την άλλη μια υπαρκτή "λαϊκή" ανώνυμη δημιουργία που μόλις τότε άρχισε να αντιμετωπίζεται με τη σοβαρότητα της επιστημονικής μελέτης, χαρακτηρίζουν το βασικό υπόβαθρο της δημιουργικής αναζήτησης.

-Μέσα σε αυτό το πλάσιο, ο Δημήτρης Πικιώνης δεν υπήρξε ένας δημιουργός που μιμήθηκε αυτά που τόσο αγάπησε, η φύση, το αρχαίο κάλλος, τη σοφία του λαϊκού δημιουργού, ούτε ένας εκλεκτικιστής που μεταφέρει απλά στοιχεία από αυτά που αγάπησε. Είναι ο δημιουργός που μέσα από μια βασανιστική διαδικασία "αυτογνωσίας της ελληνικότητας" μας άφησε έργα που έχουμε την αίσθηση ότι ήταν πάντα εκεί και οράματα που θα θέλαμε να ήταν εκεί.

-Τέλος, θα θέλαμε να πούμε ότι κάθε έκθεση των έργων του Πικιώνη έχει ένα βαθύτατο εκπαιδευτικό χαρακτήρα για κάθε νέο δημιουργό, για κάθε νέο αρχιτέκτονα, Μηχανικό. Ίσως καλλίτερα από κάθε άλλη διατύπωση το μήνυμά του στους νέους διατυπώνεται από τον ίδιο στα "Αυτοβιογραφικά Σημειώματα": "Νέοι, αποβάλλοντας το θέλημα το ατομικό, κατεβείτε εις το σκάμμα της υπακοής. Αυτή και μόνη θα σας χαρίσει την αληθινή ελευθερία. Και μην οκνήσετε ποτέ, γιατί είναι γραμμένο πως το να μην μπορέσουμε, ίσως κάποτε μας συγχωρεθεί, το να μην προσπαθήσουμε, ποτέ"

FOR DIMITRIS PIKIONIS

KENNETH FRAMPTON

I will never forget my initial encounter with Pikionis when in 1959 I first visited the Acropolis and found myself walking almost by chance in the astonishing adjacent parkscape of the Philopappou Hill. There I sensed, with great surprise, the almost literal movement of the landfall as my frame was drawn by gravity and by the tactile grip of the paving, up and down the undulating labyrinth of the terrain; a site that was to be experienced as much by the body as by the eyes. More surprising still were the stone-paved way-stations and benches and, above all, the pine-wood-framed temenos and pavilion adjacent to the reconstructed Loumbardiaris church. These last seemed as though they had been drawn from Japan, over long eons of time, through Asia and the cultural sieve of Byzantium. I did not know then that the park was not quite finished and that the seventy-two-year-old architect was still active in supervising the work. Nor did close Greek friends of mine bring this work to my attention. When questioned, they knew of it and they knew the architect's name but they did not truly understand the significance of the achievement.

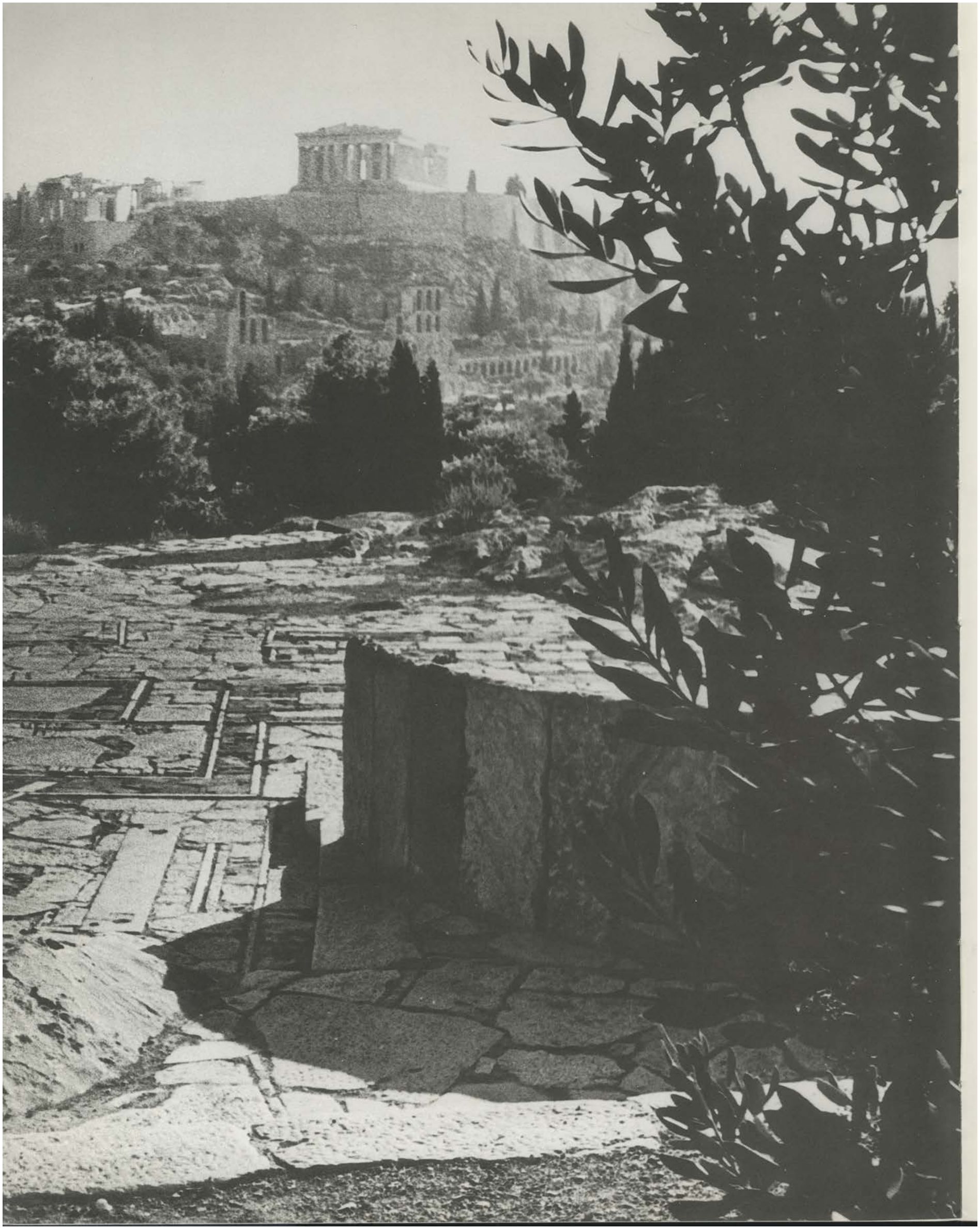
The last thirty years have changed our way of evaluating architecture. We now see back into our century over a much wider and deeper trajectory and while we are by no means anti-Modern, we are reassessing what our Modern culture has been and where we stand in relation to its multifarious strands. Thus figures that once were prominent now recede to a different level and those previously obscure and marginal emerge into the light. Pikionis is surely one of these latter-day luminaries, for his resonant work draws us back at once into a phenomenally concrete world, into a world of revealed radiance, where the 'thingness' of things, to coin Heidegger's phrase, comes into its own. Pikionis' ontic initiation dates from his frequent visits in the twenties to the Rhodakis House on the island of Aegina, a now-ruined 'vernacular' house with naive symbolic embellishments inscribed on its walls, including the legendary 'Ah Vah' — an untranslatable expression of ecstatic relief and joy.

When we look back over the total span of his career we may see it as a subtle oscillation, as a wave that first rose with a Modern reinterpretation of the Greek Neo-Classical spirit, in his Karamanos House of 1925. This wave came to its crest, so to speak, with two unequivocally Modern buildings — the Open Air Theatre and Lycabettus School of 1932 and 1933. Pikionis then broke with the Modern through his reinterpretation of the Macedonian vernacular as finally expressed in his Potamianos House in Philothei, completed in 1955. Somewhere in the sweep of this breaking wave came a point that lay beyond history, wherein the architect arrived at a dematerialized mode of expression that was at once Greek and anti-Greek; Greek in the sense that it was of the place, integrated into the mythos, the landscape, the climate and the way of life; anti-Greek in that much of its inspiration lay elsewhere, remote in space and time, in other far-flung islands, in Honshu and in the archaic pre-Hellenic Aegean under a timeless sun. This popular yet metaphysical syntax began to emerge with his designs for the unbuilt Aixoni housing settlement, near Glyfada, which he started in the early fifties. This

Δέν θά ξεχάσω ποτέ τήν παρθενική ἐπαφή μου μέ τό ἔργο τού Πικιώνη τό 1959, ὅταν ἐπισκέφτηκα γιά πρώτη φορά τήν 'Ακρόπολη καί βρέθηκα ἀπρόσμενα, σχεδόν κατά τύχη, νά περπατάω στό διπλανό, ἐκπληκτικά διαμορφωμένο χῶρο τοῦ Φιλοπάππου. 'Εκεί μέ μεγάλη ἔκπληξη, ἔνιωσα τό τοπίο σχεδόν νά κινεῖται, καθῶς ἡ βαρύτητα τοῦ σώματός μου καί ἡ χειροπιαστή, θαρρεῖς, ἔλξη τοῦ πλακόστρωτου τραβοῦσαν τό σῶμα μου πρός τά κάτω, μέσα στόν κυματώδη λαβύρινθο τοῦ ἐδάφους. Ἦταν μιά τοποθεσία πού ἔπρεπε νά προσεγγιστεῖ τόσο μέ τό σῶμα ὅσο καί μέ τά μάτια. 'Ακόμη περισσότερη ἔκπληξη δημιουργοῦσαν τά λιθόστρωτα μονοπάτια καί τά καθίσματα καί, πάνω απ' ὅλα, τό ἡσυχαστήριο-περίπτερο ἀνάμεσα στά πεῦκα πλάϊ στήν ἀνακατασκευασμένη ἐκκλησία τοῦ 'Αγίου Δημητρίου τοῦ Λουμπαρδιάρη, ποῦ ὅλα ἔμοιαζαν σάν νά εἶχαν βγεῖ ἀπό τή μακρινή 'Ιαπωνία, μέσα στούς αἰώνες, ἀπό τό δρόμο τῆς 'Ασίας καί τῆς πολιτιστικῆς κνησάρας τοῦ Βυζαντίου. Δέν γνώριζα τότε ὅτι ἡ διαμόρφωση τοῦ χώρου δέν εἶχε τελειώσει ἀκόμη, καί ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ 12χρονος ἀρχιτέκτονας συνέχιζε νά ἐπιβλέπει τίς ἐργασίες. Οὔτε καί οἱ κοντινοί Ἕλληνες φίλοι μοῦ ἀνέφεραν τίποτε γιά αὐτό τό ἔργο. Βέβαια τό γνώριζαν, ὅπως γνώριζαν καί τόν ἀρχιτέκτονα Πικιώνη, ἀλλά δέν φαίνεται νά εἶχαν καταλάβει πλήρως τή σημασία αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἐπιτεύγματος.

Τά τελευταῖα 30 χρόνια ἔχει ἀλλάξει ὁ τρόπος ἀξιολόγησης τῆς ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς. Τώρα κοιτάζουμε τόν αἰώνα μας πρός τά πίσω μέ πλατύτερο καί βαθύτερο βλέμμα καί ἐνώ δέν εἴμαστε μέ καμία ἔννοια ἀντιμοντέρνοι, ἐπανεκτιμοῦμε ὡστόσο τό παρελθόν τοῦ μοντέρνου πολιτισμοῦ καί τή θέση μας ὡς πρός τίς πολυσχιδεῖς ἐκφράσεις του. Ἔτσι πολλές προσωπικότητες πού εἶχαν συγκεντρώσει κάποτε τήν προσοχή καί τό ἐνδιαφέρον ὑποχωροῦν τώρα σέ ἕνα διαφορετικό ἐπίπεδο ἑρμηνείας, ἐνῶ ἄλλες, παραμελημένες καί περιθωριακές, βγαίνουν στήν ἐπιφάνεια. Ὁ Πικιώνης εἶναι δίχως ἄλλο μιά ἀπό αὐτές τίς φωτισμένες προσωπικότητες τοῦ καιροῦ μας, γιατί τό ἔργο του, γεμάτο ἠχώ, μᾶς γυρίζει μονομιᾶς σέ ἕνα φαινομενικά ἀπτό κόσμο, σέ ἕναν κόσμο φανερωμένης λάμψης, ὅπου ἡ ἐσώτερη οὐσία τῶν πραγμάτων, γιά νά χρησιμοποιήσω τήν φράση τοῦ Χάιντεγκερ, γίνεται φανερή. Ἡ μεταφυσική μύηση τοῦ Πικιώνη χρονολογεῖται ἀπό τίς συχνές ἐπισκέψεις, τή δεκαετία τοῦ 1920, στό σπίτι τοῦ Ροδάκη στήν Αἴγινα - ἕνα ἐρειπωμένο σήμερα "λαϊκό" σπίτι μέ ἀφελεῖς χαράξεις συμβολικές χαράξεις στούς τοίχους, ὅπως αὐτή τοῦ "Αχ Βαχ", μιά ἀμετάφραστη ἔκφραση ἐκστατικῆς ἀνακούφισης, πού ἀγγίζει τά ὅρια τῆς παραίσθησης.

'Ανασκοπώντας ὅλη τήν πορεία τοῦ ἔργου του, μποροῦμε νά τό δοῦμε σάν μιά ἀνεπαίσθητη διακύμανση, σάν ἕνα κῦμα πού πρωτοϋψώνεται μέ μιά μοντέρνα ἐπανερμηνεία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Νεοκλασικοῦ πνεύματος, στή δουλειά του στήν κατοικία Καραμάνου, τό 1925. Ἡ κορυφή αὐτοῦ τοῦ κύματος ἦταν δύο ἀναμφίβολα μοντέρνα κτίρια, τό 'Ανοιχτό θέατρο Κοτοπούλη τό 1932 καί τό Σχολικό Συγκρότημα στα Πευκάκια τοῦ Λυκαβητοῦ τό 1933, ἐνῶ ἔσκασε τελικά μέ τό συνεχή στοχασμό τοῦ Πικιώνη πάνω στή Μακεδονική λαϊκή ἀρχιτεκτονική, ὅπως φαίνεται στήν ἔπαυλη τοῦ Ποταμιάνου πού χτίστηκε στή Φιλοθέη τό 1954-55. Κάπου κοντά στό κῦμα πού ἔσκαγε, ἐμφανίστηκε ἕνα σημεῖο πέρα ἀπό τήν ἱστορία, ὅπου ὁ ἀρχιτέκτονας ἄγγιξε ἕναν ἐξαϋλωμένο τρόπο ἔκφρασης, ταυτόχρονα ἑλληνικό καί ὑπερελληνικό. Ἑλληνικό μέ τήν ἔννοια ὅτι ἀνῆκε στόν τόπο, ἐνσωματωμένος στό μῦθο, τό τοπίο, το κλίμα καί τόν τρόπο ζωῆς. Ὑπερελληνικό γιατί μεγάλο μέρος τῆς ἔμπνευσής του βρίσκεται ἀλλοῦ σέ ἕναν ἀπόμακρο χωροχρόνο, σέ μακρινά νησιά, στό HONSHU καί στόν ἀρχαϊκό προελληνικό αἰγαιοπελαγίτικο πολιτισμό, κάτω ἀπὸ ἕνα ἄχρονο φῶς. Αὐτή ἡ λαϊκή ἀν καί μεταφυσική ἔκφραση πρωτοεμφανίστηκε στά σχέδια τοῦ ἀνεκτέλεστου οἰκισμοῦ τῆς Αἰξωνῆς, κοντά στή Γλυφάδα,



manner, surprisingly evocative of the 'wattle' culture of the nomadic Greek Sarakatsan people, reached its clearest formulation in the Arestedis Pourris House built at Maroussi in 1953. In addition to these autochthonous forms, his granddaughter Alexandra Papageorgiou has written of the Oriental traces that may be found in his work in the following terms.[1]

> **He was stringently against the use of Western forms which are more representative of science and technology, and more tolerant of Eastern forms which are closely related to the ideals of a spiritual world. He admired the scale, form and materials of elements found in Japanese architecture, such as bamboo. He employed similar methods of construction, for example he elevated the ground floor of the Loumbardiaris pavilion and used stone footings at the base of its columns...**

Of the same generation as Le Corbusier and Mies, Pikionis was one of the first architects to realize that a regionally inflected culture of Modern architecture could only be sustained in a post-vernacular age through the admixture of sympathetic alien cultures, just as Greek archaic sculpture had once been fertilized by Egypt. As Alexandra Papageorgiou points out, even the paving of the Philopappou site bears an uncanny relation to the stone causeways of Zen temples and gardens, its patterns breaking across the curvature of the site, denying any perspectival anticipation of movement and engendering a seemingly infinite series of seams, gulleys and counterchanging coursework.

Pikionis' importance today derives from what one might call his onto-topographical sensibility — that is, from his feeling for the interaction of the being with the glyptic form of the site. The first intimations of this sensibility can be found in his 1935 essay 'A Sentimental Topography', first published in the *Third Eye* magazine, wherein he wrote:

> **We rejoice in the progress of our body across the uneven surface of the earth. And our spirit is gladdened by the endless interplay of the three dimensions that we encounter at every step... Here the ground is hard, stony, precipitous, and the soil is brittle and dry. There the ground is level, water surges out of mossy patches. Further on, the breeze, the altitude and the configuration of the ground announce the proximity of the sea... Stone, you compose the lineaments of this landscape. You *are* the landscape. You are the Temple that is to crown the precipitous rocks of your own Acropolis. For what else does the Temple do but enact the same twofold law which you serve?... Is it not because of this concordance, because the same laws are at work in both nature and art, that we are able to see forms of life, forms of nature transformed before our very eyes into forms of art and vice versa?...**

It is this almost ecological insistence on the interdependency of culture and nature which gives Pikionis' work a critical edge that is as relevant today as it was thirty years ago. For it repudiates our habitual fixation on the freestanding technical and/or aesthetic object, not to mention our destructive, Promethean attitude towards nature that once was beneficial but now is assuming the ominous dimensions of a tragic legacy. While Pikionis realized very little in his sixty years of practice (some six houses, a school, a theatre, a park, a playground and an apartment building) and while he never had to deal with commissions of the socio-technological complexity that characterizes so much of our contemporary building, he nevertheless strove for a symbiotic, ontological architecture, where the identity of the subject and of the society would be redeemed through mutual reverence. Like Constantin Brancusi, Luis Barragan and Carlo Scarpa, Pikionis invariably worked within very modest formats, such as we find in the oneiric playground that he realized for small children in 1965 in the Athenian suburb of Philothei. Close to the 'not yet' of Ernst Bloch, Pikionis' architecture was an architecture of hope. While he was all too aware of the growing harshness that was enveloping his beloved Greece on every side, he nonetheless evoked a vision of a Mediterranean civilization that was 'other', a Baudelairean sense of luxus shimmering in the light, after the fall of technology.

Notes

1. Alexandra Papageorgiou, *Pikionis and His Work*, thesis submitted to the Rhode Island School of Design, Department of Architecture, 1982.

πού ὁ Πικιώνης τά ἄρχισε στίς ἀρχές τῆς δεκαετίας τοῦ 1950. Αὐτή ἡ τεχνοτροπία πού ἀνακαλεῖ ξαφνικά στή μνήμη τίς "καλαμωτές" κατασκευές τῶν Σαρακατσαναίων, ἑνός νομαδικοῦ ἑλληνικοῦ πληθυσμοῦ, ἔφρασε στή διαυγέστερη ἀποτύπωσή της στή κατοικία τοῦ Ἀριστείδη Πουρρῆ πού χτίστηκε στό Μαρούσι τό 1955. Ἐκτός ἀπό αὐτές τίς αὐτόχθονες μορφές, στό ἔργο τοῦ Πικιώνη μποροῦμε νά βροῦμε ἀναλαμπές ἀπό ἴχνη ἀνατολικῶν ἐπιδράσεων, ὅπως ἀναφέρει ἡ ἐγγονή του Αλεξάνδρα Παπαγεωργίου.

> **Ἦταν αὐστηρά ἀντίθετος στή χρήση δυτικῶν μορφῶν πού ἀντιπροσωπεύουν περισσότερο τήν ἐπιστήμη καί τήν τεχνολογία, καί πιό ἀνεκτικός στίς ἀνατολικές μορφές, πού εἶναι στενά συνδεδεμένες μέ τά ἰδεώδη ἑνός πνευματικοῦ κόσμου. Θαύμαζε τήν κλίμακα, τή μορφή καί τά ὑλικά διαφόρων στοιχείων τῆς ἰαπωνικῆς ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς, σάν τό μπαμπού. Ἐφάρμοσε καί ὁ ἴδιος ἀνάλογες κατασκευαστικές μεθόδους, ἀνυψώνοντας γιά παράδειγμα τό πάτωμα τοῦ περιπτέρου στό Λουμπαρδιάρη καί χρησιμοποιώντας πέτρινη βάση γιά νά στηρίξει τίς κολόνες...**

Ο Πικιώνης, τῆς ἴδιας γενιᾶς, μέ τόν LE CORBUSIER, ἦταν ἕνας ἀπό τούς πρώτους ἀρχιτέκτονες πού συνειδητοποίησε ὅτι μιά τοπική ἔκφραση τῆς μοντέρνας ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς, στή μεταπαραδοσιακή ἐποχή, μποροῦσε νά ὑποτηριχθεῖ μόνο μέσα ἀπό τήν ἀνάμειξη ξένων ἀλλά φιλικῶν μεταξύ τους πολιτισμῶν, ἀκριβῶς ὅπως ὁ πολιτισμός τῆς Αἰγύπτου εἶχε γονιμοποιήσει τήν ἀρχαϊκή γλυπτική. Ὅπως σημειώνει ἡ Παπαγεωργίου, ἀκόμη καί στό πλακόστρωτο τοῦ Φιλοπάππου μποροῦμε νά διακρίνουμε μιά παράξενη καί ἀπόκοσμη σχέση μέ τά λιθόστρωτα τῶν ναῶν καί τῶν κήπων Ζέν, καθῶς ἡ διάταξη τῆς σύνθεσης διεισδύει στίς καμπύλες τοῦ ἐδάφους, ἀρνούμενη κάθε προοπτική προσδοκία κίνησης καί δημιουργώντας μιά φαινομενικά ἀπεριόριστη σειρά αὐλακιῶν, φρεατίων καί ἐναλλασσομένων τεχνητῶν ἐπιστρώσεων.

Ἡ σημασία τοῦ Πικιώνη σήμερα πηγάζει ἀπό ὅ,τι μποροῦμε ἴσως νά ἀποκαλέσουμε οντο-τοπογραφική εὐαισθησία, πού σημαίνει μιά αἴσθηση ἀλληλεπίδρασης τῆς ὕπαρξης μέ τή γλυπτική μορφή τῆς τοποθεσίας. Οἱ πρῶτες νύξεις αὐτῆς τῆς εὐαισθησίας βρίσκονται σέ ἕνα δοκίμιό του τοῦ 1935 μέ τόν τίτλο "Συναισθηματική Τοπογραφία", δημοσιευμένο στό περιοδικό *Τό 3ο Μάτι*. Σέ αὐτό τό κείμενο ὁ Πικιώνης γράφει:

> **Χαίρεται τό προχώρεμα τοῦ κορμιοῦ ἐπάνω ἀπό τήν ἀνάγλυφη τούτη ταινία πού εἶναι τό ἔδαφος. Καί τό πνεῦμα μας εὐφραίνεται ἀπό τούς ἄπειρους συνδυασμούς τῶν τριῶν διαστάσεων τοῦ Χώρου, πού μᾶς συντυχαίνουν καί ἀλλάζουν στό κάθε μας βῆμα...Ἐδώ τό ἔδαφος εἶναι σκληρό, πετρώδες, ἀπότομο, τό χῶμα εἶναι ξερό. Ἐκεῖ ἡ γῆ εἶναι ἐπίπεδη. Νερό ἀναβλύζει ἀνάμεσα ἀπό βρύα. Ἐδῶ οἱ πνοές, τό ὕψος καί ἡ σύσταση τοῦ ἐδάφους μᾶς ἀναγγέλλουν τή γειτνίαση τῆς θάλασσας...Σύ συνθέτεις τά διαγράμματα τοῦ τοπίου. Εἶσαι τό τοπίο τό ἴδιο. Ἀκόμα περισσότερο, εἶσαι ὁ Ναός πού θά ἐπιστρέψει τίς ἀπορρῶγες πέτρες τῆς Ἀκροπόλεώς σου. Γιατί τί ἄλλο κάνει ἐτοῦτος, εἰμή νά δουλεύει εἰς τόν διπλό τοῦτο νόμο πού ὑπακούεις; Εἶναι ἴσως ἡ πλήρωση τῶν ἴδιων νόμων μέσα στή φύση καί τήν τέχνη, ἡ ὁμορρυθμία τούτη, πού μᾶς κάνει νά βλέπουμε νά μεταμορφώνονται μπροστά μας οἱ μορφές τῆς ζωῆς καί τῆς φύσης σέ μορφές Τέχνης, κι ἀντίστροφα;...**

Εἶναι αὐτή ἡ σχεδόν οἰκολογική ἐπιμονή στήν ἀλληλεξάρτηση πολιτιστικῶν φαινομένων καί φύσης ἡ ὁποία δίνει στό ἔργο τοῦ Πικιώνη μιά κριτική αἰχμηρότητα, ἀποκαλυπτική σήμερα ὅσο καί πρίν ἀπό τριάντα χρόνια. Καί αὐτό γιατί τό ἔγο του ἀποκηρύσσει τή συνήθη ἐμμονή μας στό ἐλεύθερο τεχνικό καί/ἤ αἰσθητικό ἀντικείμενο, δίχως νά ἀναφέρουμε τήν καταστροφική, προμηθεϊκή συμπεριφορά μας πρός τή φύση, πού μᾶς ἦταν κάποτε εὐεργετική ἀλλά τώρα προσλαμβάνει ἀπειλητικές διαστάσεις μιᾶς τραγικῆς κληρονομιᾶς. Ἐνῶ ὁ Πικιώνης πραγματοποίησε λίγα κατά τή διάρκεια τῶν ἑξήντα χρόνων τῆς δουλειᾶς του (περίπου 6 κατοικίες, δύο σχολεῖα, ἕνα θέατρο, ἕνα πάρκο, ἕναν παιδικό κῆπο καί μιά πολυκατοικία) καί ἐνῶ ποτέ του δέν ἀσχολήθηκε μέ ἀναθέσεις πιό πολύπλοκες στό κοινωνικό-τεχνολογικό ἐπίπεδο, ὅπως αὐτές πού χατρακτηρίζουν τό μεγαλύτερο μέρος τῆς σύγχρονης οἰκοδομικῆς δραστηριότητας, παρ ' ὅλα αὐτά στράφηκε πρός μιά συμβιοτική, ὀντολογική ἀρχιτεκτονική, στό πλαίσιο τῆς ὁποίας ἡ ταυτότητα τοῦ ὑποκειμένου καί τῆς κοινωνίας θά ἐβρισκαν τή λύτρωση μέσα ἀπό τόν ἀμοιβαῖο σεβασμό. Ὅπως ὁ CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI, ὁ LUIS BARRAGAN καί ὁ CARLO SCARPA, ἔτσι καί ὁ Πικιώνης δούλεψε συνεχῶς πάνω σέ λιτά προγράμματα, ὅπως αὐτο τοῦ ὀνειρικοῦ παιδικοῦ κήπου πού ἔφτιαξε στό ἀθηναϊκό προάστιο τῆς Φιλοθέης τό 1965. Πλησιάζοντας στήν ἔννοια τοῦ "μήπω" τοῦ ERNST BLOCH (τοῦ "ἀκόμη ἀδιαμόρφωτου"), ἡ ἀρχιτεκτονική τοῦ Πικιώνη ἦταν μιά ἀρχιτεκτονική τῆς ἐλπίδας. Ὁ ἴδιος, ἐνῶ εἶχε πλήρη συνείδηση τῆς αὐξανομένης τραχύτητας πού σκέπαζε σέ κάθε γωνιά τήν ἀγαπημένη του Ἑλλάδα, παρ' ὅλα αὐτά ἐπικαλέστηκε ἕνα ὅραμα μεσογειακοῦ πολιτισμοῦ πού ἦταν "ἄλλος", μιά Μπωντελαιρική αἴσθηση λαμπυρίζοντος πλούτου στό φῶς πού ἀπλώνεται μετά τήν πτώση.

Σημείωση

1. Ἀλεξάνδρα Παπαγεωργίου, "*PIKIONIS AND HIS WORK*", Διπλωματική Ἐργασία στό RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN, Τμῆμα Ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς, 1982.

DIMITRIS PIKIONIS: ELABORATION AND IMPROVISATION

DIMITRIS ANTONAKAKIS

It is my belief that in the recent past Greek architecture has been greatly impoverished and has not contributed in the least to the cultural evolution of our country. This situation is the fault of not only the architects and their critics, but also of the public, which cannot even differentiate between architects, civil engineers, and contractors. While architects criticize the indifference of the public towards the constructions that shape the city, architecture still tends to be seen as the exclusive preserve of specialists; a technical matter. Only a few voices have attempted to open up the debate in an effort to reveal the importance of architecture in everyday life.

One such voice belonged to Dimitris Pikionis, whom I met in the fifties. By then, he was a mature man with a lifetime's accumulated knowledge derived not only from his philosophical and historical studies and his exposure to the pioneers of contemporary art, but also from the adverse experiences brought about by political events — the persecution of his friends and students, the nightmarish distortion of the post-war Greek ideal, and the emergence of a society where values were limited to *power* and *profit*.

Pikionis waged a secret war against these things. Speaking allegorically, he drew our attention to *virtue*, which he defined with the help of verses from Solomos, Sikelianos and Palamas[1] — although his words were lost on much of his audience. To many, Pikionis represented the stereotypical Greek intellectual; a poor teacher in a worn-out overcoat, an old man chasing rainbows, behaving in an old-fashioned way, talking through his teeth and letting the words mingle with the coffee stains and cigarette butts on the table, all the while keeping his eyes down to avoid the astounded looks on the faces of his students.

> **Winter. Early evening.**
> **I am alone on the patio of the architectural faculty. The high door of the Neo-Classical building opens. A grey overcoat and a grey hat appear. It is Pikionis, stooping, with a cigarette butt between his lips. He turns up the collar of his overcoat and looks at the ground absent-mindedly. He walks forward, alone. The rays of the sun penetrate the transparent gates, reaching the marble parapet that we had been measuring, remeasuring and plotting the day before. Suddenly he stops as if something appears strange to him and turns back towards the door to look at the illuminated parapet. Then he approaches and rests his hand on it. He touches it in the same way as a blind man tries to identify a beloved person. He is absorbed and distant. He makes sure. He turns up his grey collar once more and walks away, trying to light his cigarette butt.**

In the fifties, students were given critical texts which linked Greek cultural activity to international events: they covered poetry, prose,

painting, theatre, but not architecture. The Greek architects of the inter-war period — Valentis, Despotopoulos, Karandinos, Mitsakis, Panagiotakos, Papadakis — did not figure in any of the publications which reached the country at the time. It seemed as if modern architecture existed only in the West and in the few foreign magazines available to us.

Pikionis was then the only teacher of architecture whose buildings could not be tagged by convenient labels. Everybody talked about him, whether they agreed with him or not. Few of his students really followed in his footsteps, yet this did not seem to bother him. He was devoted to building and designing.

> **I met him one day as he was coming out of a bookshop. 'Come and see', he said, and he guided me back to the archaeological section. He opened a book on the Acropolis of Athens, and went through it until he came to a photograph of the sacred rock. 'Look at the sky... What clouds. The Acropolis, the Parthenon, everything changes, yet everything has the same weight.'**

Pikionis taught us that organizing space means much more than placing a series of interesting pictures along a path, or achieving a 'structural' combination of functions. Rather, it implies putting everyday activities into an order which reflects the importance we attach to ourselves and others, to individual and collective life. By this reasoning, our private space, or the one we propose to others, becomes a measure of our attitude towards life. If our environment shows inconsistency, frivolity or a lack of judgement, it is because these elements are to be found somewhere within us. Therefore, to elaborate an architecturally coherent space, we have to refer to a mystical life that begins in the depths of our consciousness and reveals itself as it relates to our surroundings.

When I first met Pikionis he was building a house for Potamianos in Philothei. He was at the site almost every day, collaborating with the workmen — explaining, inquiring, sketching and deciding. Construction was for him the logic by which the characteristics of the materials were revealed. He maintained that quality of space could be achieved even with inexpensive materials, as long as they were combined in delicate and innovative ways. His concern for detail went far beyond decoration. It was for him a way of restoring a harmony between space and materials, of reviving our childhood instincts of learning through seeing, touching and smelling. It is well known that an unusual organization of space is more readily accepted if it employs familiar materials. Because materials are essential components of life, they have the power to

re-establish man's relationship of immediacy with his environment. Pikionis made use of a wide range of materials, both natural and artificial, traditional and modern. He approached all with the attitude of a craftsman. He always explained *what* he wanted to do and not *how*, allowing his collaborators to take the initiative and contribute meaningfully to the project while still retaining overall control. In this way, he laid the groundwork for the development of a new way of thinking, for the renewal of a constructional logic that had been worn out by everyday life.

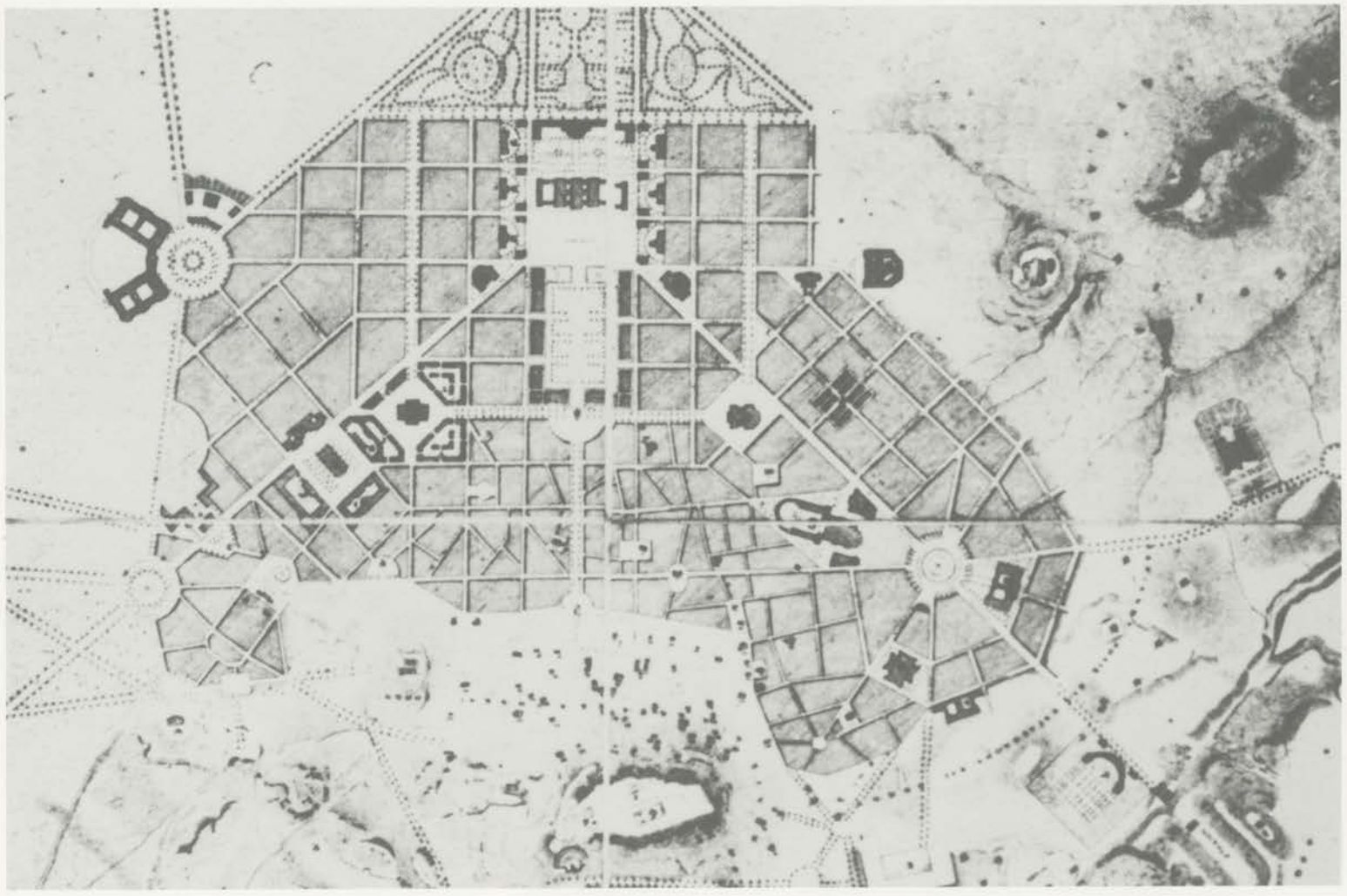
The fifties saw the wholesale demolition and rebuilding of Athens. During this period, the city's architectural vocabulary seemed reduced to simplistic clichés. In this context, Pikionis' contribution appeared to be not merely another way of thinking but a revolution against the indifference towards what was being built and why. He condemned all the things that were destroying the Athenians' relationship with their surroundings and called for a rhythm and care which were alien to those times. Unable to counter his arguments with logic, his opponents resorted to tactics of misinterpretation and malice. Therefore, instead of being used as a basis for further thought and action, Pikionis' vocabulary was slandered or copied in a frivolous manner.

'Synthesis', Paul Valéry said, 'is an artificial invention which attempts to give order to a primitive chaos of feelings and natural evolution. It involves intentional and contemplative actions that discipline the impulsiveness of a natural production according to a particular conception.'[2] These words also ring true for Pikionis. With unusual perseverance, he would initiate each day a fresh ceremony of inquiry at the construction site, rejecting one solution after the other, as if caught in a process of catharsis, reorganizing and reordering his material until he approved of the final form.

> **Yesterday evening he told me, 'I tried to place five objects on the table: a vase, a glass, an ashtray, a box of cigarettes and a matchbox ... It was not at all easy. It lacked geometry, frame. There was an absence of order. Then I tried to implement the "Doxiades" laying-out method[3] and the subdivision of distances according to the analogies of the Golden Section. The result was much more solid, the picture much more precise, the reference more visible.'**

Pikionis used to say: 'One must work ceaselesssly and prepare oneself for that instant when the lightning flashes in the dark, so one can *see*.' He told his students to keep their eyes and ears open and their minds and spirits free. However, this readiness had to be accompanied by a clarification of the principles of synthesis, so that

Plan of Athens by S. Kleanthes and E. Schaubert, 1833



any improvised decisions would not mar the holistic nature of the composition. Thus, each set of original decisions ran into the next one to form a continuous, albeit 'arbitrary', emotional geometry bound up with the interpretation of the landscape.

At the Acropolis, the size of the construction made it impossible for him to supervise everything — where mistakes occurred, they had to be rectified on the spot. In doing this, he would search for the principles by which he could incorporate the mistake into a system of exceptions, thus activating the predetermined geometry. During this struggle, it seemed as if he was not merely thinking, but functioning with his hands and his body as a whole, so that the work was the outcome not only of logical correlations but of a totality of bodily impulses. He would improvise by moving objects forwards then back, up then down, until he was certain of the result. Only then would he take up an axe to hit the wood, or a chisel to sculpture the stone. Aware of his weaknesses, he tested them against the problem, and in this way strengthened both himself and the project.

While still a student, I was fortunate enough to spend some time working on the Acropolis project during the summer of 1956 and the following winter. I actually saw very little of Pikionis. He was absorbed by the work at Loumbardiaris and could not be persuaded to come up to the Acropolis where we worked. 'I trust you', he used to say. 'Trust leads to responsibility.'

His work at the Acropolis was indeed an act of confidence: confidence in those who would spend time in that place; confidence in the old folk who rested on the low stone walls or carefully walked down from one flight of steps to another; confidence in the children who hopped from one flat stone to another, taking care not to tread on the cracks — he watched them mesmerized, recognizing in their dancing movement an interpretation of his own original decision.

> **Morning at the Acropolis. At breakfast we sat in the small coffee shop at Loumbardiaris. On the shelf above the fireplace was a glass with red roses.**
> **'Yesterday', he said, 'Tsarouhis[4] passed by and pointed them out to me... See how their presence transforms the light.'**
> **He had taken hold of some biscuits and was chewing them absent-mindedly. A street-cleaner, passing by, saw him and shouted: 'Hey, old man, do you live on biscuits now?'**
> **He laughed wholeheartedly.**

The quality of an artist depends upon the quantity of past he bears within him,' Jean Gris once said.[5] This seems apposite for Pikionis, who constantly assembled and copied ancient texts, creating a collage of memories which allowed him to become absorbed in the

Overleaf:
chariot riders, relief, fourth century BC,
Acropolis Museum

Athens Academy, architect, T. Hansen

depths of history. For the pathway under the Acropolis, he collected the marble and clay shards left over from the shameless demolition of nineteenth-century Athens and composed them into a giant collage of both past and present, an open dialogue with the monuments, the landscape and time.

> **I met him in front of a kiosk. It was the third day of the trial of the opposition. Dictatorship. He was looking at the newspaper headlines. He held my hand. I felt he was moved — as I was too. I remember his words:**
> **'They left nothing standing... where is this country heading?... Oh what shame.'**
> **He lifted his head, stood up straight and looked at me. I still remember his eyes, huge behind his magnifying eye-glasses. Then he looked down again. I bent over to listen.**
> **'We must endure', he mumbled and, for quite a long time, he pressed my hand with a strength unbelievable for an old man... I think we said no more.**
> **Then his small slender figure vanished in the crowd. I never saw him again...**

There, under the Acropolis, in the days after the civil war when intolerance prevailed, these references to the past were a way of talking about the future — a reminder of who we were and where we came from. The collage derived from the ruins became a mirror inviting us to look at ourselves and at what previous generations had left us. It was also a protest, a touching attempt to get through to a city that had been demolished with unbelievable cynicism and barbarity by its own citizens.

Pikionis sought the elusive 'Greekness' that resides in the materials, plants, techniques and ideas of the land. But he found himself alone in his efforts. There was no critical comment, and an uninformed public saw only the surface of things.

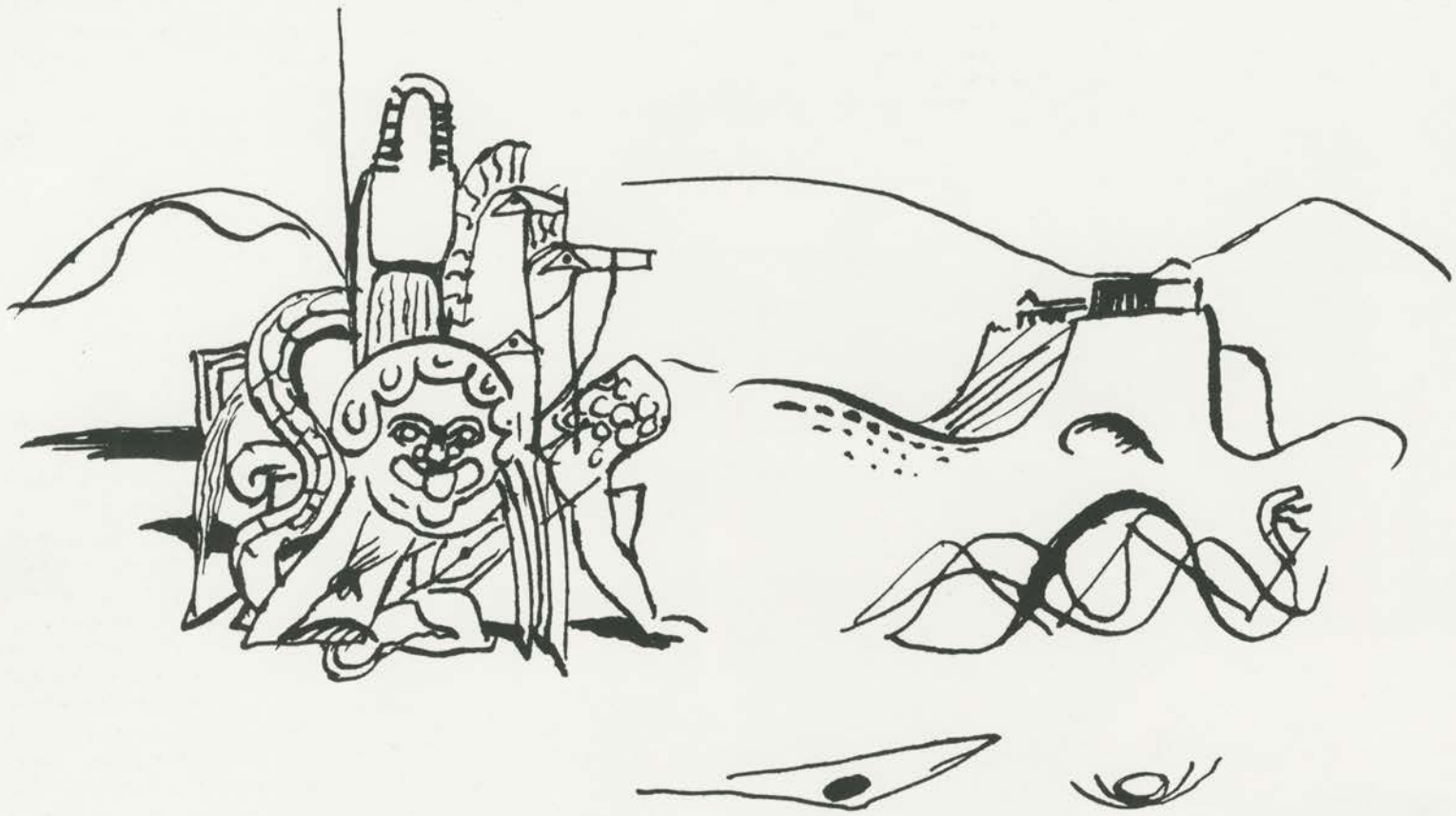
Take a walk to Loumbardiaris today. Has his work been understood by succeeding generations? Or by the State? Or by tourists? We profit from his contribution but at the same time we destroy it, vulgarize it. Every day, as his work becomes more distorted, we gradually extinguish the traces of his unprecedented presence.

Notes

1. Greek poets: Solomos (1798-1857); Palamas (1859-1942); Sikelianos (1884-1951).
2. Paul Valéry, *Situation de Baudelaire,* Monaco 1924.
3. See issues 4, 5 and 6 of the *Third Eye.*
4. A contemporary Greek painter.
5. Roger Garaudi, *D'un réalisme sans rivage,* Paris 1963.

DIMITRIS PIKIONIS IN CONTEXT

SAVAS CONDARATOS



Pikionis spent many years studying and painting the landscape around Athens arriving, in his 'Attica' drawings, 1940-50, at a synthesis of nature, art and myth. In this particular example, the landscape is inhabited by many of the figures relating to the foundation myths of Athens: Athena with her lance, a gorgon's head, a horse. The snake – symbolizing birth from the earth and eternal renewal – is also present as a transfiguration of Erichtonios, son of Athena, and as a formal element, in the serpentine skyline of the mountains.

Born in 1887, Pikionis was of the same generation as Le Corbusier, Mies, Gropius, Mendelsohn, Asplund, Lewerentz, Tatlin, Rietveld, Oud and other leading architects of the Modern Movement. Yet while he had great empathy for their tenets and achievements, his own views and work lay outside the limits of conventional Modernism. His position in the modern architectural history of Greece, although very important, is also somehow eccentric. He was always held in high opinion by his colleagues, his students and the *cognoscenti*, but he never became the leader of a school, and the most lasting and fecund influence he exerted was on those who assimilated his teaching without necessarily following him on the hazardous path he had chosen.

In Greece, Pikionis is mainly associated with a specific cause: that of revealing the permanent characteristics of an age-long regional tradition and bringing them to bear on the development of a modern yet distinctively 'Greek' architecture. He was not the only one to espouse this cause, but he was the first to order its disparate ideological strands into a consistent *profession de foi* that could be tested in action. Consequently, to understand Pikionis' work today, we should view it against the background of this 'Greek' issue.

It is natural for a new nation to enhance its identity by reconstructing its past. With the first stirrings of Hellenism in the eighteenth century, while the country was still under Ottoman rule, Greeks found they could refer to the glory of ancient Greece as well as to the magnificence of the Byzantine Empire: each pole of reference exercised a different appeal over the predominant groups in the society of the time. The upper clergy and nobility attached to the Ottoman administration referred to the Byzantine legacy, while the rising bourgeois class of merchants and intellectuals, influenced by the European Enlightenment, were attracted by the remote ancient Greek world. Later, the struggle for independence and the political tension within the Balkan region reinforced the nationalistic trends.

A further influence in the nineteenth century was the European Romantic movement, with its nostalgia for the past and emphasis on nationhood. This generated the 'Great Idea' — or idea of a great fatherland — which prompted the Greek historian Paparrigopoulos to proclaim as an indisputable historical truth the continuity of Hellenism throughout the ages, with the Byzantine Empire forming the link between ancient and modern Greece. This period also saw the initiation of research aimed at documenting the survival of ancient elements within modern folk culture. While Europeanization was generally seen as a prerequisite for progress, there were still many who deplored the adoption of foreign customs, believing in the self-sufficiency of the East.

The outcome of all this ideological fermentation was contradictory and confused: claims to almost exclusive rights on the classical heritage vied with ambitions for the re-establishment of the Byzantine Empire; attachment to an affected, Atticizing language contrasted with the idealization of popular traditions; verbose reactions against the incursion of foreign elements belied the prompt acceptance of Western models. Towards the end of the century there were attempts to put an end to this confusion and to promote modernization, but these were only really successful in the field of language. Finally, the defeat of the Greek army by the Turks in 1897 and the humiliating terms imposed by the Great Powers in the Treaty of Constantinople put an end to the Great Idea and led to a more introvert, almost mystical brand of nationalism.

During the first two decades of this century some intellectuals, under the influence of Taine, Barrès and Nietzsche, formulated their demands for a new 'Greekness' in the cultural life of the country. Pericles Yannopoulos gave this idea an aesthetic dimension by idealizing the Greek landscape; Ion Dragoumis expressed through it his hopes for national regeneration; and the poet Anghelos Sikelianos offered it a mystical universality by evoking the cosmic and eternal qualities of Hellenism.

After the defeat of the Greek armed forces in Asia Minor in 1922 and the subsequent exodus of the Greek population, a new generation of intellectuals, largely influenced by German idealist philosophy and poetry, tried to enhance national consciousness through their literary and philosophical studies. At the same time, research into folklore focused attention on the continuity through the ages of living Greek popular tradition.

In architecture, nationalistic feelings were satisfied up to the beginning of this century by the adoption of Neo-Classicism, the prevailing architectural style in Europe when the Greek state was born. Vernacular architecture, as it had developed under Ottoman rule in small rural communities, did not offer any models for the new urban construction, but the imported Neo-Classical style served contemporary needs and, at the same time, was obviously 'Greek'. Thus during the nineteenth century all public buildings and many residences for the well-to-do were designed either by Greek architects who had studied in Germany, Italy or France, or by foreign architects who were fascinated with the idea of using the classical Orders in the country that had given birth to them. The Byzantine style was reserved almost exclusively for churches, and even then a more or less classicizing version was used.

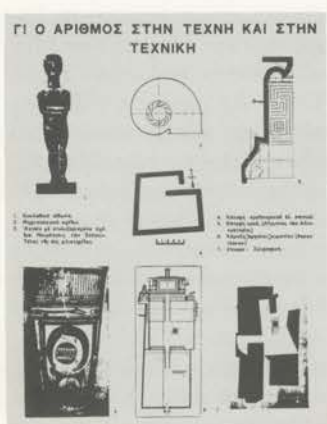
Neo-Classicism remained the official style in Greece until 1920, although after 1890 it had to compete with eclectic and anti-classicist tendencies. At the beginning of the twenties, however, two Greek architects turned to the folk tradition for inspiration. They were Aristotelis Zachos (1879—1939), who mixed vernacular elements with a Neo-Byzantine style; and Dimitris Pikionis, who soon emerged as the most eloquent proponent of 'Greekness'.

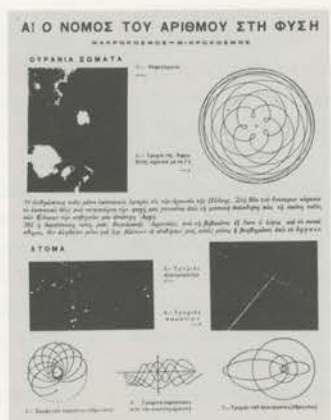
Pikionis was a man of practice who did not despise physical labour. 'Manual work', he remarked, 'offers us practical knowledge, a feeling for matter and its fashioning, things that no theory is able to teach us.' He preferred to express his ideas orally, in a low voice which forced his listeners to pay close attention. He also wrote in a fascinating, individual style, but the texts he left us — largely reflections on projects he had undertaken — amount to little more than two hundred printed pages.

Pikionis did not indulge in any systematic researches. Even reviewing the existing literature on a subject he was greatly interested in seemed alien to his temperament. His learning, although undoubtedly vast, was incomplete and uneven. He read widely and his alert mind picked up stimuli from disparate sources. He made notes on pieces of paper and memorized phrases that happened to attract him: most of the quotations that appear in his own writings are therefore cited from memory and are not always exact.

From his writings and the content of his lecture courses at the Polytechnic of Athens, we can reconstruct fairly accurately Pikionis' main sources of reference. Auguste Choisy's *Histoire de l'architecture* and Julien Guadet's *Eléments et théorie de l'architecture*, two vital books for many students at the beginning of the century, were most probably the mainstays of his architectural education. To these should be added John Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and a fair number of Modern Movement manifestos and theoretical texts, principally Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*. Other sources included notebooks and memoirs by famous artists, essays on harmonic proportions and some rather esoteric writings like Schwaller de Lubicz's *Le temple dans l'homme*, a theosophical essay on ancient Egyptian temples. However, most of the texts Pikionis read were not directly related to architecture. Ancient Greek literature was important to him, as were the writings of the fathers and hymnographers of the Orthodox Church. He frequently mentioned French and German philosophers and poets, and was fascinated by Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. His intellectual leanings are indicated by the presence in his library of works by Leon Chestov and Rabindranath Tagor — the latter probably acquainted him with the key notions of Indian aesthetics which he recruited in his polemic against Western rationalist approaches. He was also very fond of modern Greek literature, especially poetry, and above all, he read the works written by his friends: Yannis Apostolakis, a literary critic who greatly admired Greek folk songs and the Greek national poet Solomos; Yannis Theodoracopoulos, a Neo-Platonic philosopher; and the poet Anghelos Sikelianos — to mention only those who exerted the most influence on him. Equally important for his intellectual development must have been his frequent conversations with his painting teacher Parthenis and other artists, including the Italian Giorgio de Chirico, who was born and educated in Greece.

If Pikionis, like a bee, picked up precious pollen from the gardens of both ancient wisdom and modern thought, his greatest lessons were learned by carefully observing works of art and





Above:
drawing from the 'Attica' series, 1940-50

Left and opposite:
pages from the Third Eye *journal, published between 1935 and 1937 by Pikionis and a group of painters: S. Doukas, N. Hatzkyriakos-Gika, S. Karantinos and Sp. Papaloukas. During its brief life-span, the journal introduced to Greece the work of painters such as Cézanne, Kandinsky and Klee and stimulated debate on the arts with articles on harmonic proportions, cosmology, ethnography, etc.*

ΕΚΔΟΣΗ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΛΛΙΕΡΓΕΙΑΣ & ΤΕΧΝΗΣ

ΜΟΥΣΙΚΗ ΤΕΧΝΗ ΠΟΙΗΣΗ ΘΕΑΤΡΟ ΕΘΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ ΝΕΟΙ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ

τὸ 3ον μάτι

ΕΚΔΙΔΕΤΑΙ ΚΑΘΕ ΜΗΝΑ

ΑΠΟ ΜΙΑ ΟΜΑΔΑ ΦΙΛΩΝ

ΧΑΤΖΗΚΥΡΙΑΚΟΣ-ΓΚΙΚΑΣ
ΔΗΜ. Π. ΠΙΚΙΩΝΗΣ
ΣΠΥΡΟΣ ΠΑΠΑΛΟΥΚΑΣ
ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ ΚΑΡΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ
ΣΤΡΑΤΗΣ ΔΟΥΚΑΣ
ΤΑΚΗΣ Κ. ΠΑΠΑΤΖΩΝΗΣ
ΜΙΧΑΛΗΣ Θ. ΤΟΜΠΡΟΣ
ΑΓΓΕΛ. ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ

7 - 12

ΕΞΑΠΛΟ ΤΕΥΧΟΣ

Ο ΝΟΜΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΡΙΘΜΟΥ ΣΤΗ ΦΥΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΣΤΗΝ ΤΕΧΝΗ

ΕΓΓΡΑΦΗ: Οἱ φίλοι τοῦ περ.οδικοῦ δίνουν 100 δρ. τὸ μῆνα· ἔχουν μιὰ ἔκδοση ὀνομαστικὴ πολυτελείας, καλλιτεχνικὸ ξώφυλλο στο τέλος τοῦ χρόνου καὶ ἕνα σχέδιο χαραγμένο καὶ ὑπογεγραμμένο ἀπὸ τὸν καλλιτέχνη· τὸ ὄνομά τους βρίσκεται γραμμένο σὲ εἰδικὴ σελίδα οἱ συνδρομὲς εἶναι 100 δρ. τὸ χρόνο, καὶ ἐξωτερικοῦ φράγκα 3.

ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ: ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΟ "ΤΡΙΤΟ ΜΑΤΙ" ΑΘΗΝΑ-ΚΡΙΕΖΩΤΟΥ 2

ΔΡΑΧΜΕΣ ΠΕΝΗΝΤΑ

Η ΣΥΝΘΕΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΥΛΗΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΕΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΔΟΣΕΩΣ ΤΟΥ ΤΕΥΧΟΥΣ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΕΓΙΝΕ ΑΠΟ ΤΟΥΣ Ν. ΧΑΤΖΗΚΥΡΙΑΚΟ-ΓΚΙΚΑ ΚΑΙ Δ. Π. ΠΙΚΙΩΝΗ

1 9 3 7

ΠΕΡΙΕΧΟΜΕΝΑ

Ν. ΧΑΤΖΗΚΥΡΙΑΚΟΥ-ΓΚΙΚΑ: ΕΙΔΟΣ ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗΣ

I

Α.' Ο ΝΟΜΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΡΙΘΜΟΥ ΣΤΗ ΦΥΣΗ. (Τέσσερις πίνακες).

II

ΕΥΚΛΕΙΔΟΥ: ΚΑΤΑΤΟΜΗ ΚΑΝΟΝΟΣ. Εἰσαγωγὴ ΘΡ. ΓΕΩΡΓΙΑΔΟΥ.

Β.' ΜΑΘΗΜΑΤΙΚΟΣ ΛΟΓΙΣΜΟΣ. ("Ενας πίναξ).

ΑΘ. ΓΕΩΡΓΙΑΔΟΥ: Η ΑΡΜΟΝΙΑ ΕΝ ΤΗ ΑΡΧΙΤΕΚΤΟΝΙΚΗ ΠΟΙΗΣΕΙ. Ἐπεξηγηματικὰ σχόλια Γ. ΜΕΓΑΡΕΩΣ

ΓΕΩΜΕΤΡΙΚΕΣ ΜΟΝΑΔΕΣ ΣΤΟ ΕΠΙΠΕΔΟ ΚΑΙ ΣΤΟ ΧΩΡΟ. Κατὰ τὸ βιβλίο τοῦ M. Ghyka. (Τρεῖς πίνακες).

Κ. ΔΟΞΙΑΔΗ: ΟΙ ΘΕΩΡΙΕΣ ΤΩΝ ΑΡΜΟΝΙΚΩΝ ΧΑΡΑΞΕΩΝ ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΑΡΧΙΤΕΚΤΟΝΙΚΗ.

Σ. ΜΥΛΛ. ΟΙΚ.: ΤΑ ΜΑΘΗΜΑΤΙΚΑ ΚΑΙ Η ΔΙΑΚΟΣΜΗΤΙΚΗ.

Δ. ΠΙΚΙΩΝΗ: Η ΘΕΩΡΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΡΧΙΤΕΚΤΟΝΟΣ Κ. Α. ΔΟΞΙΑΔΗ ΓΙΑ ΤΗ ΔΙΑΜΟΡΦΩΣΗ ΤΟΥ ΧΩΡΟΥ ΕΙΣ ΤΗΝ ΑΡΧΑΙΑ ΑΡΧΙΤΕΚΤΟΝΙΚΗ.

Δ.Π.: ΟΡΘΟΓΩΝΙΚΟΙ ΔΥΝΑΜΙΚΟΙ ΚΑΝΟΝΕΣ ΣΤΟ ΕΠΙΠΕΔΟ ΚΑΙ ΣΤΟ ΧΩΡΟ Μὲ δύο πίνακες. Κατὰ τὸν M. Ghyka.

Δ. ΠΙΚΙΩΝΗ: ΑΡΜΟΝΙΑ ΧΡΩΜΑΤΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΝΩΝ

III

KURT SACHS: Ο ΙΕΡΟΣ ΧΟΡΟΣ (Μετ. Γ. Σ.)

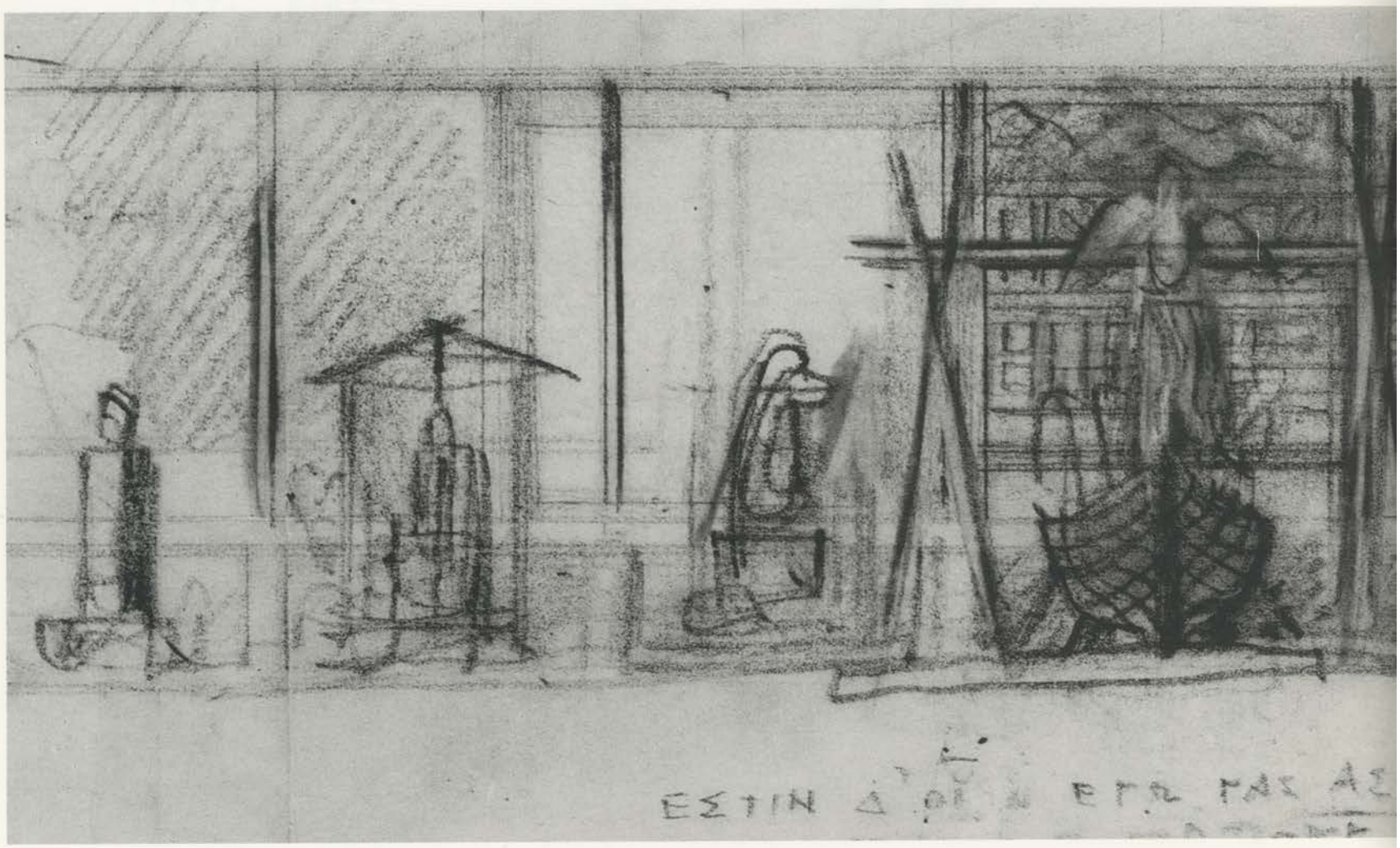
Ο ΡΥΘΜΟΣ ΣΤΟ ΛΟΓΟ Κατὰ τοὺς: CLAUDEL, M. GHYKA, M. J. SERVIEN.

ΚΑΡΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ: ΘΕΑΤΡΟ.

Ν. Χ. Γ.: ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΙΚΟ ΚΕΙΜΕΝΟ ΣΤΟ: Γ.' Ο ΝΟΜΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΡΙΘΜΟΥ ΣΤΗΝ ΤΕΧΝΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΤΕΧΝΙΚΗ. (Δεκατρεῖς πίνακες)

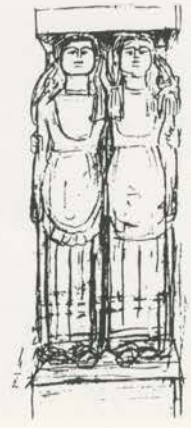
PAUL KLEE: ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΙΚΟ ΒΙΒΛΙΟ ΜΕ ΣΚΙΤΣΑ. (Μετ. Σ. Γ. καὶ Π.)

KANDINSKY: ΣΗΜΕΙΟ ΚΑΙ ΓΡΑΜΜΗ ΕΠΑΝΩ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΕΙΑ (Μετ.Σ. Δ. καὶ Π.)



In his preliminary drawings for the elevation of the Loumbardiaris pavilion, Pikionis incorporates vernacular motifs, such as a figurehead or 'Akroprora' and a boat. Also presented are archaic motifs, including two horses that bear a close resemblance to the archaic marble horses at the Acropolis Museum.

Alexandra Papageorgiou



ΟΥΚ ΕΠΑΚΟΥΩ
ΦΥΤΕΥΜΑ ΑΓΗΡΑ

Pikionis led study trips on behalf of the Society of Greek Vernacular Art to Kastoria and Zagora in northern Greece. The illustrations on the opposite page and on the bottom row of this page are taken from two folios of the groups' photographs, sketches and measured drawings published by the Society in 1948 and 1949.

Period photograph of Greek island village

The man of the soil (chorikos) *needs no desk, no pencil in order to draw the boundless lines of his imagination. He has read no architectural books and knows nothing of the character of rhythm. He knows completely the necessities of life. He sets out his plan on the ground in, as it were, dotted lines, but at the same time he sees the spaces in his imagination as if the finished house already stood before him... Irregularity, not sought for on purpose, regularity where possible, symmetry or asymmetry, how beautifully this harmonizes with the nature that surrounds it.*

Pikionis, 'Our Folk Art and Ourselves', 1925.

From 1908 to 1912, Pikionis studied painting first in Munich and then in Paris, where he became acquainted with the work of the masters of Modern art. The painting below was one of a series he made to practise for himself Cézanne's theory of the third dimension.

architecture at first hand, both in Greece and abroad. He would analyse the relations he saw between shape, shade and colours, searching for the hidden meaning of forms.

Shortly after graduating from the Athens Polytechnic in 1908 with a degree in civil engineering, Pikionis went to Munich to study painting. After seeing three canvases by Cézanne, however, he was so impressed that he decided to go on to Paris. He remained there three years, studying first painting and then, as funds became scarce, architecture. He particularly admired Cézanne, for his efforts to render depth through pure colour; and Rodin, for his ability to organize sculptural mass as if from within — although he also became familiar with other masters of Modern art, including Picasso, Braque, Matisse and Klee. It was from these influences that Pikionis formulated his own ideas about architecture, art and the importance of tradition.

According to Pikionis, there were 'intimate affinities' between the various 'races' and their 'ideals', but also 'unbridgeable contrasts'. He noted that: 'Each race is destined to achieve different things. And each one always remains true to its own essence, even if the deeds it aims to perform change according to the spirit of each age.'[1] Yet while the traditions of the various peoples differed from each other in a significant way, they were still united within a 'universal tradition' as 'survivals of very ancient forms and rhythms which, in spite of their transfiguration over time, had preserved their primordial essence intact'.[2] Pikionis believed that each tradition, as the 'genuine expression of the soul of a particular nationhood', deserved the utmost respect. This did not mean, however, that all national traditions were of equal value — some were situated closer to the 'spiritual centre' of the universal tradition than others.[3] He saw a significant difference between Eastern and Western traditions: whilst the West was distinguished by achievements that proved its knowledge, inventiveness and ability to lead; the East, which for Pikionis extended from Tibet to the Balkan Peninsula, excelled in spirituality. The former spoke of a 'yearning for worldly power', while the latter revealed and symbolically expressed a mystical relationship with nature and the divine.[4]

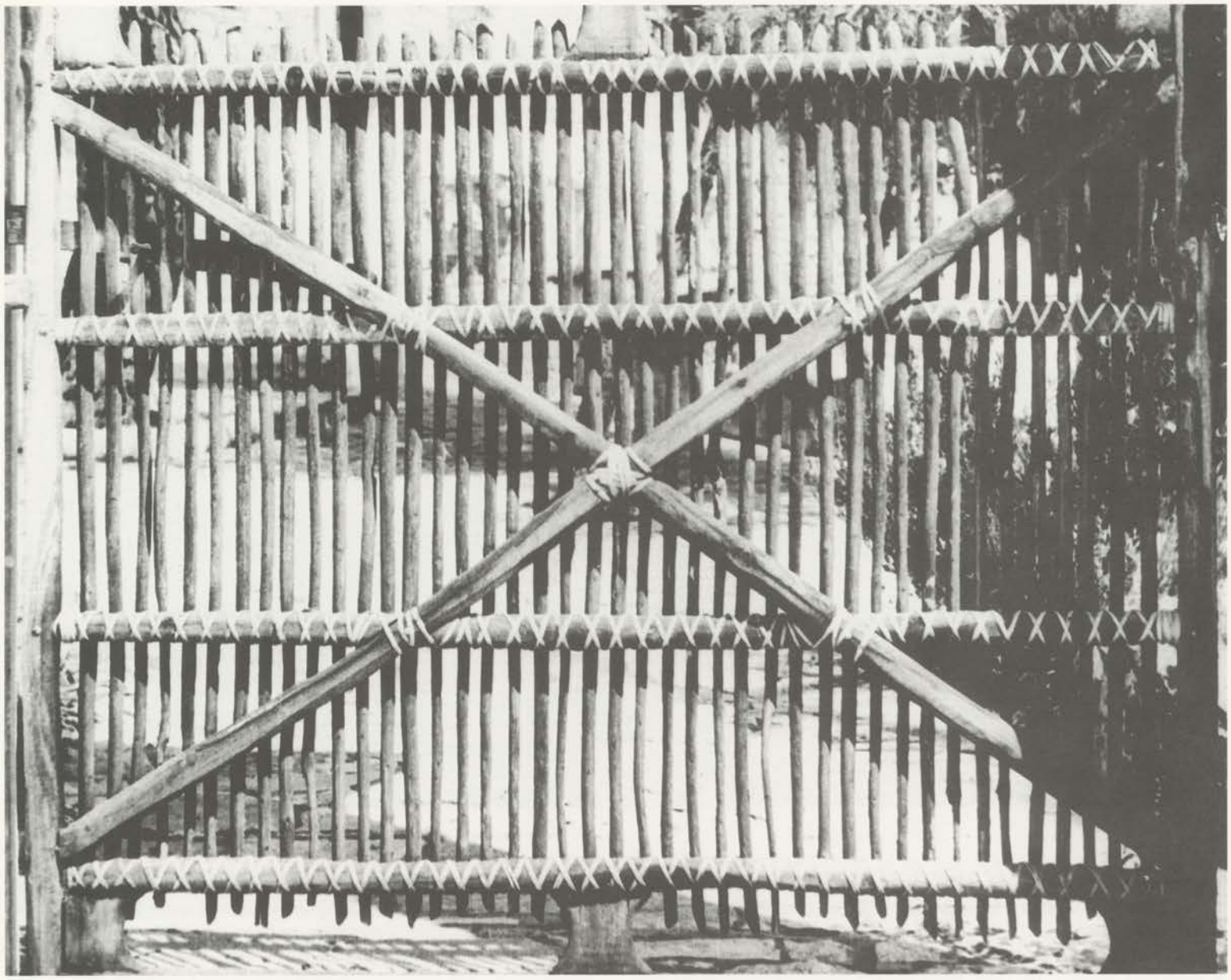
Greek art was seen to hold a privileged position within the Eastern tradition, on account of its pure and organic character, its truth of forms and nobility of ideals. Although appearing inconsistently over time, these things were not temporary manifestations, but were congenial to the essence of Hellenism. The seeds of such virtues, Pikionis insisted, were not lost but still lived

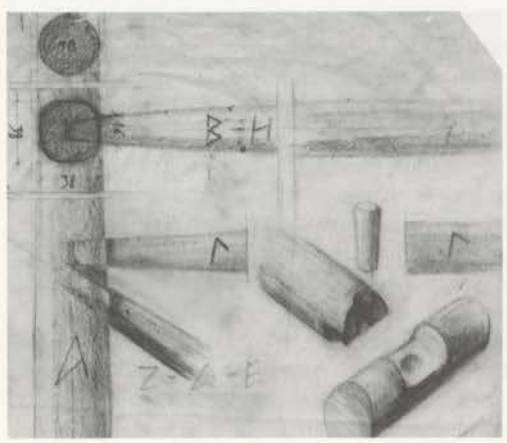
Study of the Rhodakis House, Aegina

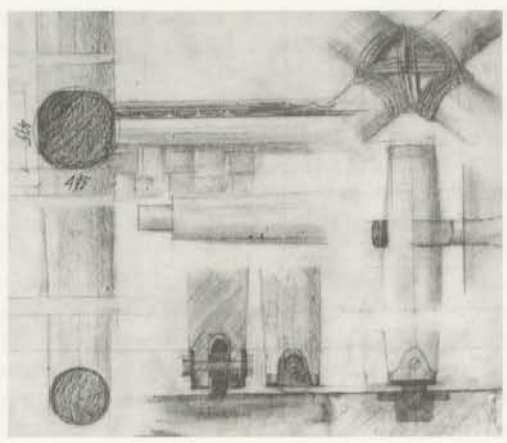
within modern Greeks, especially within 'simple people' kept away 'from historical vicissitudes'. Thus in folk art, 'where the water of tradition runs purest', the forms, in spite of their 'apparent worthlessness and poverty', maintained 'the essence of ancient virtues and, at the same time, were the irreplaceable catalyst for any regeneration'.[5] Pikionis therefore considered the re-establishment of a genuine and creative relation with that tradition to be a crucial issue in modern Greek architecture. What he called for was not a superficial imitation of vernacular forms but a sensitive approach towards traditional patterns and symbols which would enable the modern mind to 'go back to its primeval sources and, at the same time, visualize the future'.[6]

There are obvious parallels between Pikionis' credo and the theses propounded by Yannopoulos, whom he had met while still a student. The basic ideological themes are the same: namely the emphasis on the cultural continuity and superiority of Hellenism, the worship of the Greek land as the cradle of all the race's virtues and the role of folk tradition as the repository of 'Greekness'. Similar themes can also be found in the writings of Dragoumis. However, Pikionis quoted neither of these men, perhaps because he was uncomfortable with Yannopoulos' shallow aestheticism and Dragoumis' restricted nationalism. Instead he referred to his friend Sikelianos, an almost oracular poet who was well versed in ancient esoterism and modern theosophy; to Nietzsche's Dionysian outlook; Bergson's philosophy of intuition; and Ludwig Klages' anti-rationalism. Yet Pikionis' importance does not lie in this highly personal amalgamation of ideas borrowed from various sources, but rather in his attempts to pinpoint the very elements which defined Greece's historical continuity and set it apart from other traditions. He made a painstaking study of all the cultural manifestations of Hellenism from ancient times to the present, including poetry, the visual arts and architecture, searching for the correspondences between them. What he expected from this intellectual labour was the 'illumination of the Greek world', a self-knowledge that would allow modern Greeks to realize their true identity.

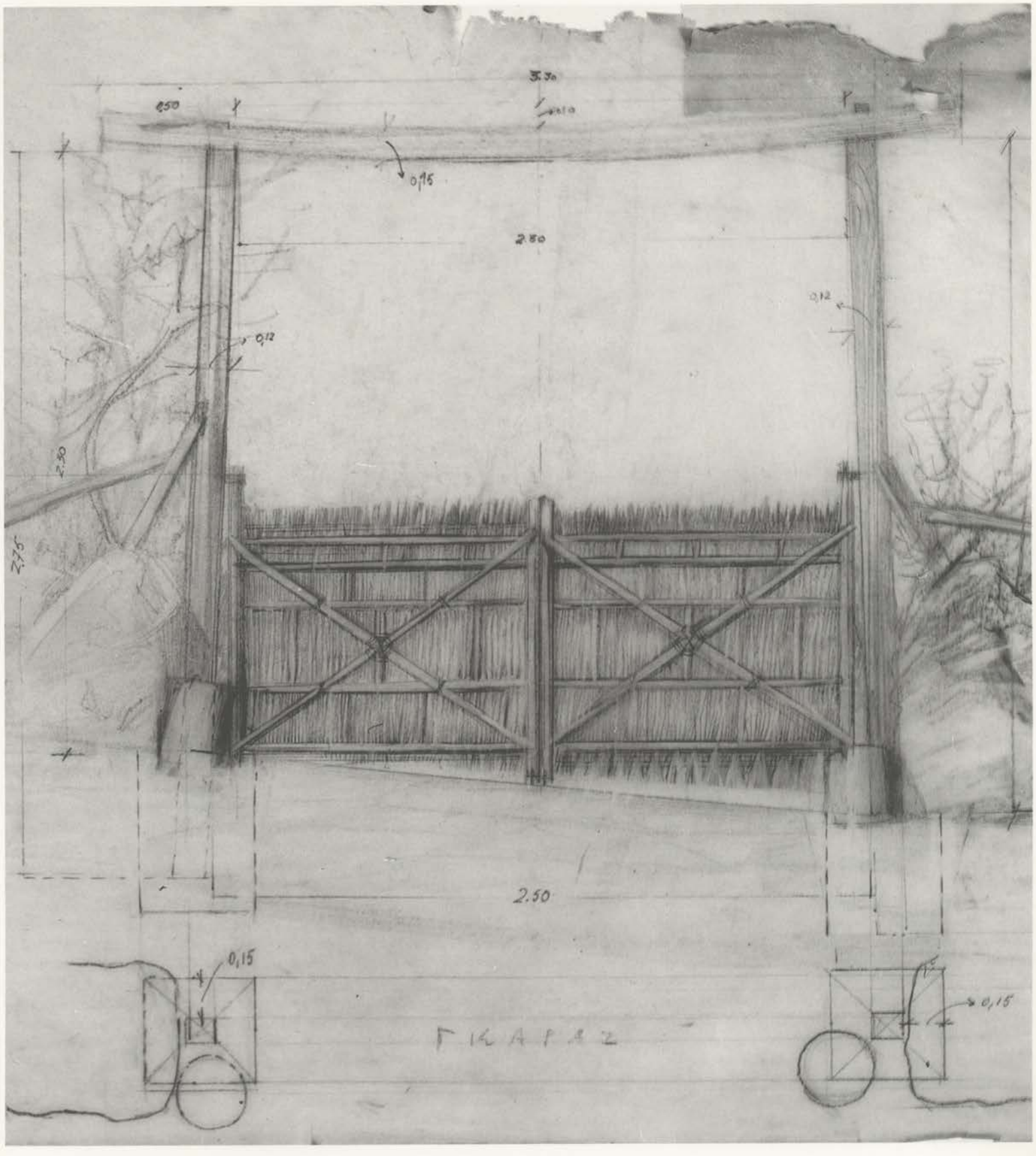
Pikionis' work was also influenced by ideas that had little to do with Romanticism. Inspired by objective idealism, he placed the Heraclitean logos at the centre of the universal tradition as a 'reckoning of the arrangement of all things' — a natural rule-of-law that might be reduced to the power of Numbers according to Pythagorean teaching. Pikionis believed that art expressed our ideas and feelings about life in a symbolic language that was essentially



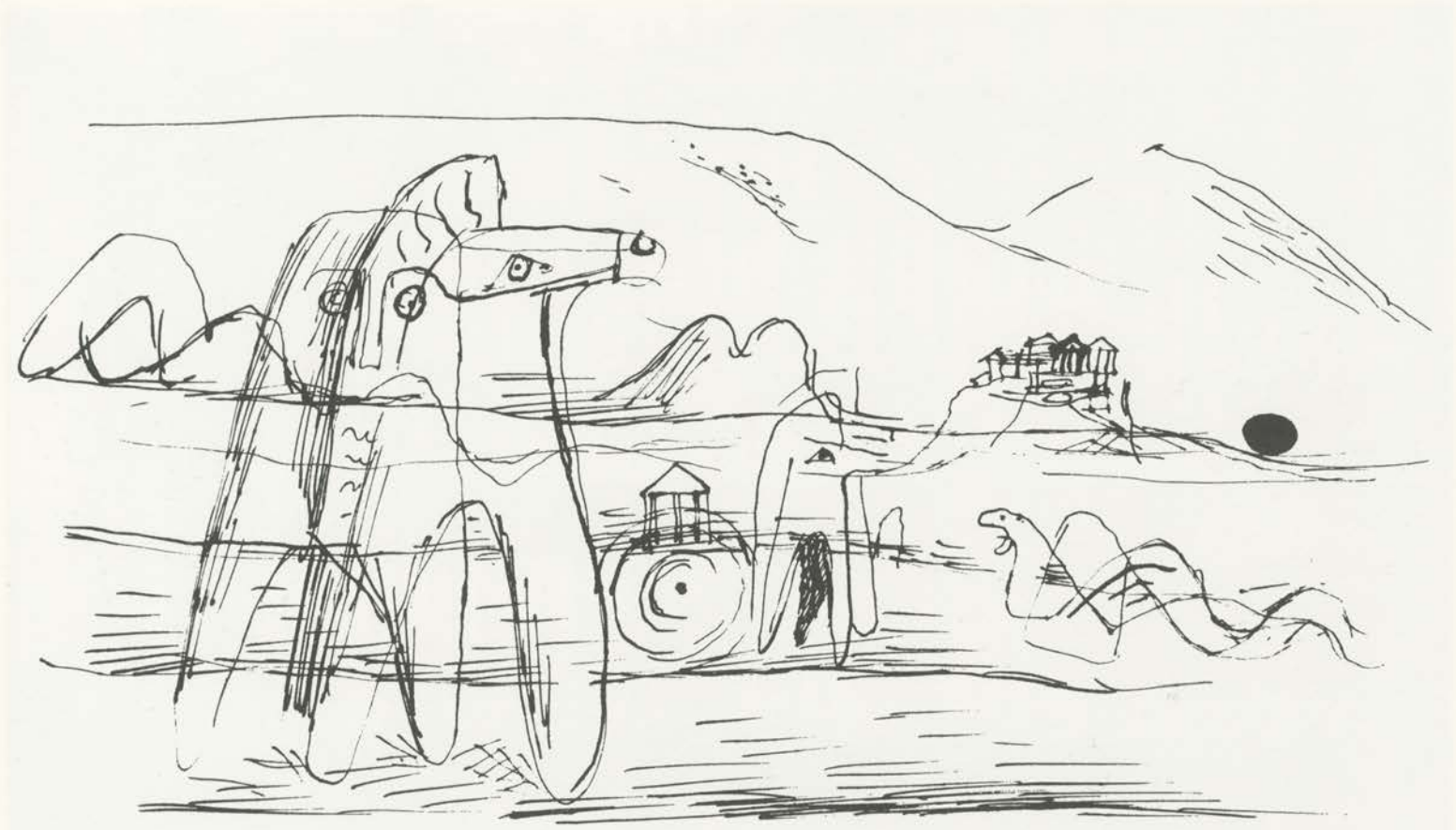




Pikionis' entrance canopies make reference to the ancient Greek propylon. Occasionally, they are also reminiscent of Far Eastern structures, as in the playground at Philothei (see pages 58-61).


3.30
0.50
0.15
2.50
0.12
0.12
2.30
2.75
2.50
0,15
0,15
ΓΚΑΡΑΖ

During the Second World War period Pikionis, then already in his fifties, continued his study of the landscape around the Acropolis as far as the Aegina. In the abstract 'Attica' series, the black and white shapes are combined in surrealist compositions employing simple calligraphic lines so that the compositions become symbols in themselves.



'obedient to the eternal laws of the universe', because all things were 'part of a universal harmony'. It was this fulfilment of the same laws within nature and art, or *homorrythmia*, which allowed the forms of life and nature to turn into forms of art.[7]

These convictions were critical to Pikionis' argumentation. If he maintained that ancient Greek art and Byzantine art belonged to the same tradition in spite of their different characters, it was because he had found that both obeyed the laws of mathematical harmony. If he adopted Yannopoulos' theory of the Greek land as the birthplace of a distinct tradition, it was because he had discovered a particular geometry within that land. And if he insisted on the need to study anonymous folk architecture, it was because he believed that the man of the earth, acting out of necessity, submitted to the 'innumerable conditions presented by nature' and responded to its eternal laws with an intuitive sense of harmony.

Once again, there is nothing new about the metaphysical kernel of Pikionis' aesthetics. Its source is the Pythagorean and Platonic concept of a harmonic universe — a notion that was given renewed impetus during the Renaissance. Pikionis, however, probably never read the Renaissance treatises but picked up the idea directly from the ancient sources and modern interpretations of them. There was in fact a significant revival of the theory of proportions and the contiguous practice of 'harmonic tracings' during the nineteenth century, not through official philosophy but through essays written by archaeologists interested in aesthetics or by mathematicians with mysticist leanings. This in turn influenced many avant-garde artists and architects at the beginning of this century: for example, a group of Cubist painters took the title *Section d'Or*, whilst Le Corbusier firmly believed in the value of *tracés regulateurs* and Mondrian was inspired by the 'plastic mathematics' of the Dutch theosophist Schönmakers. The phenomenon is not difficult to explain. Pythagorean, Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas, imbued with modern occultism, provided Modernism with a theoretical validation of its course towards abstraction.

Pikionis shared these views because he believed it necessary to lean on principles of objective and universal validity. This, more than anything else, is what led him to first embrace the Modern Movement in art and architecture. The new era, he wrote in 1931, would be inaugurated by 'those artists, architects, sculptors or painters who strive to restore the universal aesthetic pattern of our epoch, so enabling us to leave behind the inferior forms of naturalism and realism and approach the essence of art'.[8] Fifteen years later, he continued to view Modernism as 'a movement of universal significance',

Overleaf: landscape drawing by Pikionis

Pikionis' sketches and pencil drawings... were concerned not only with objects but also with the process of creation ... Almost unprofessionally, he drew with love... He drew in order to proceed further.
Emile Chlimintzas

saying that 'underneath the newness of its forms and the revolutionary character of its principles, it is concealing its efforts to reconnect with the principles of the great traditions'.[9] At the same time, he pointed out that Greek tradition, because of its universality, had a close affinity with the Modern Movement and was 'as *open* to the forms introduced by the avant-garde as, for example, the Renaissance is *closed* to them'.[10] While Pikionis still believed Modern art to be the best means of interpreting the unconscious rationalism to be found in tradition, he had by then turned his back on architectural Modernism and disowned his overtly Modernist primary school on the Lycabettus Hill in Athens. Modernist rationalism, he believed, was inimical to the irrational and the suprarational, to the instinctive and the intuitive — things which were for him manifestations of the eternal logos. It aimed to serve 'human needs in a purely materialistic manner', contenting itself with a 'shallow and narrow interpretation of principles correct in themselves'.[11]

Pikionis, some decades ago, was among the first to emphasize the importance of place and memory and to oppose ahistorical internationalism. Early on, he denounced Modernist town planning as 'arbitrary games played with a pencil on a piece of tracing paper and then transferred onto our sacred land'.[12] He never accepted the functionalist dogma; nonetheless he appreciated the avant-garde architects of his generation, especially Le Corbusier, whose path, he felt, ran parallel to his own.

Pikionis' ideas found further expression in a small number of built works. However, he remained somewhat ambivalent towards these buildings, fearing they might be misunderstood. He insisted his work was not historicist or populist, but rather transhistorical — an attempt to visualize the 'Greek' architecture of an imaginary epoch. Whilst he felt that he successfully expressed this idea in some of his sketches, he was less certain of his buildings and consequently focused his efforts on creatively reinterpreting a number of models he considered to be exemplary. He had few direct followers on this course. His students found that the myth which inspired him had ceased to function in their times. However, Pikionis left them with one vital idea: that 'architecture, more than any other art, may bring *poetry into everyday life*'.[13]

Notes

1. D. Pikionis, *Keimena* (Texts), edited by Agnis Pikionis and Michalis Parousis, Athens, 1985, pp.218-19.

2-13. op.cit., pp.157, 157, 216, 221-2, 221, 77, 89, 163, 163, 256, 57, and 69.

All quotes translated from the Greek by the author.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

DIMITRIS PIKIONIS

'Who by setting us on the road
Made this a valid law —
That men must learn by suffering.'
Aeschylus, *The Agamemnon*[1]

I was born in Piraeus in 1887. My parents came from Chios; my mother and the mother of the poet Lambros Porphyras were sisters, nées Syriotis. I received both my elementary and secondary schooling in Piraeus. Anybody who realizes how important it is for a child to spend his early, formative years near a brilliant tutor, like the dearly remembered Iakovos Dragatsis, who had something of the ancient seer about him, will understand why his pupils have kept his memory alive in their hearts throughout their adult years.

Before I go any further, I hope I may be allowed to devote a few lines to the sacred memory of my parents, for it is from our parents that our being takes root and grows to maturity.

From an early age my father, the son of a sea captain, had shown an inclination for painting. From his own accounts, I learned that he was barely sixteen-years-old when he painted the sea battle that took place in 1868 off the harbour of Syros between the flagship of Hobart Pasha and our own *Enosis*. I also learned that the British Consul in Piraeus had sent this picture to the New York *Daily Mail*. When we went walking along the waterfront on Sundays with my uncle Syriotis and my cousins, my father would always stop in front of a fine ship and draw our attention to the beauty of its lines. Frequently, too, he would stop in front of a house and explain why its proportions would be much improved if, for instance, it were a few inches taller. It was through my father that I became familiar with common architectural terms such as '*garbos*' (gracefulness, style) and '*houï*' (adeptness, particularity).

As for my mother, she had an unusual nobility of character. Extremely sensitive, compassionate and responsive to other people's misfortunes, she was also stern, just, upright and unselfish, and always passionately concerned with the welfare of Greece.

It is these inherited moral and artistic propensities that I keep discovering in my own character, sometimes coexisting in balanced unison, sometimes opposed in agonizing conflict.

I had the rare privilege of having a cousin who was a poet. It was from his mouth that I first heard the songs of our people, the poems of Solomos and others. He opened up a magical world before my childish eyes. For this I owe him everlasting love and gratitude. I also feel obliged to mention Nirvanas, Labelette, Melas and the painter Miliadis, who have always proved true friends to me. Finally, I should also like to mention my fellow students, in particular Dimitris Botsaris, with whom I became bound in a pure and steadfast friendship.

My inclination for painting became apparent at a very early age. As I think back, I discover that within the infant — within the child's impulses, unformulated thoughts, weaknesses and strengths — all the essential aspects of his adult character, indeed his entire destiny, already lie concealed. Although I know that I have no room for digression here, I feel I must dwell further upon my childhood, not out of vanity, but out of the desire to illustrate the importance of the spiritual seeds implanted in childhood.

I remember once holding a small clay horse that had disproportionately thick legs and saying to myself: 'Yes, the horse's legs are thick and ugly, but somehow I wouldn't like it to have thin legs. For some reason they have to be thick ... these are the kind of legs a clay horse should have. Come to think of it, this is the way I would have them and no other.' Although fashioned by the mind of a child, this observation spoke of the truth which the wise man knows — namely, that art is the proper application of mimesis to matter. There was another instance, when an uncle of mine, a plain, straightforward man, asked me to draw a donkey for him. I produced a picture which won me much praise, yet I was left with the suspicion that for all its verisimilitude, it lacked the quality which expressed the essence of a donkey. The lesson was not long in coming. 'Now let me draw a donkey for you', my uncle suggested, and I saw that his drawing, though less accomplished than mine, glowed with that very quality I had unconsciously sought — the thing which 'annuls the judiciousness of the judicious and puts to shame the wisdom of the wise'. Indeed, is it not this manifestation, this revelation of a deeper reality that we strive towards, and hope for, and wait for all our lives as the reward of our labours?

An inner voice kept telling me that we did not come into this world willingly, but to expiate some past offence. I once asked myself the question: 'Am I pure?', but at the same time I wondered, 'What do I know about purity ... How can I know its true meaning?' I was always being told that I must be good, and so I tried to be, but deep within me, I suspected that I was good simply out of weakness. Yet I did have a strong sense of justice, and there came a time when I fought hard for it, although torn between two of the people I loved most in the world — an experience that put my youthful feelings through the most arduous ordeal.

Children listen to secret, inner voices. They learn all the time, every minute and hour of the day, and always at the right time, as only children can learn when they are on their own. I drew my knowledge from all things, from nature, from other people's behaviour. I sensed that each person requires a special upbringing, a special method of education adapted to their own particular inclinations, if they are to flourish. From an early age, I felt the need for a teacher who could read my thoughts and feelings and guide me on my way. Apart from my actual tutors, nature and friendship among my peers have also proved invaluable teachers to me.

My grandmother used to take my sister and me down to the headland of the Phreattys every day for a walk. We strolled over the jagged rocks where the sea breeze gently stirred the slender stalks of the wild plants that sprouted through the cracks; we wandered across the god-bearing soil that was littered with bits of broken pottery, picking our way between gaping wells which spoke to me of the ancient people who once dwelled in this land — my land. And thus I gradually formed an image in my mind of the spirit and the history of my land.

While still at school, I often took long walks exploring the Attic countryside. I would set off from Moschato, cross the olive grove, and finally reach the rocks on the Philopappou Hill and the Acropolis; or I would follow the banks of the Cephisus river until I came to the Sacred Way. Later on, another favourite walk was across the empty landscape that leads to Kaisariani. But who can adequately describe the impact of these sites upon a young man still enveloped in Goethe's 'magic mantle of poetry'? How can I convey what these solitary wanderings meant to me, what joy filled my soul at the sight of the freshly ploughed soil in the vegetable gardens, steaming faintly under the fiery rays of the sun? O, the bliss of suddenly coming upon an unknown cliff; the joy of walking slowly through the sacred olive grove, the foothills of Athens, the rocks ... the grottos dotting the sides of Pallas Athena's rock and her noble temple... In the distance, the musical harmony of mountains and

hills, and above it all the pure air, the brilliant light, the ineffable harmony of the twilight hours.

I finished secondary school in 1903 and found that I now had to choose a profession for myself. I could have gone to the distant land of India, like my maternal uncles, where I would have become familiar with the art and philosophy of one of the world's greatest civilizations. But I let that rare opportunity pass me by. As on many other occasions in my life, something held me back and prevented me from taking the right course. Instead, in 1904, I enrolled at the Polytechnic of Athens. I attended the same classes as Joseph Pestarinis, who became one of the best-known electrical engineers of our generation and one of my closest friends. In the fine Arts building just opposite ours Kantzikis, Bouzianis and De Chirico, among others, were engrossed in their own studies. I found Bouzianis too shy and rebarbative to be approached. He would not even tolerate my frequent and gratuituous visits to Classroom No.7, where he and the others worked. In contrast, De Chirico and I soon became close friends and we had endless discussions about painting and our future plans under the arcades of the Polytechnic.

I also became acquainted with Kambouroglou and Pericles Yannopoulos. The former was an Athenian elder who looked as if he had stepped out of an ancient bas-relief. In his presence one had the impression that here was an indigenous, authentic inhabitant of this land, whereas all the rest of us were merely late settlers. As for Yannopoulos, everyone expected him to be something that, at that particular time, he could never become. Suffice it to say that he was the embodiment of the noblest, proudest type of Greek.

I met Parthenis in 1906. I first saw an exhibition of a dozen small paintings of his on wood (showing views of places such as the Sacred Way, Lycabettus Hill, Acropolis, Tower of the Winds, and the pine trees of Kaisariani). I found much beauty in the square framing, the precision of the drawing, the definition of tones, the extremely exact gradation of colour and I immediately asked to be introduced to him. Bearing a letter of recommendation from K. Michaelidis, the editor of the periodical *Panathenaea*, I rang the doorbell of his studio behind the church of St Eleftherios. He answered the door, but only opened it part of the way, obstructing the entrance with his body. His bright eyes were fixed upon me; his expression was stern and haughty. Eventually he read my letter and allowed me in. I showed him some samples of my work, which he praised. He then asked me whether I had read any handbooks on the treatment of colour, and if I was familiar with the complementary colours. He advised me to trace the outlines of objects as accurately as possible, and to clearly define the various colour tones. On the walls, I noticed some paintings he had made of the monastery at Poros, and felt an unbridled admiration.

He asked me to come and see him again. From that day on, we met frequently, and I always accompanied him whenever he went out to paint in the open. I was happy — at last I had found the educator, the true teacher I needed for my art. I must have been his very first pupil.

It was Parthenis, assisted by Yannopoulos, who prevailed upon my father to allow me to study painting. In 1908, I left with my father for Munich, where we were welcomed by K. Hatzopoulos (a good friend of my cousin, the poet Porphyras) and his Finnish wife. I also met De Chirico again, just one month before he left for Italy. He showed me some of the copper engravings he had made at the Academy, and I showed him some of my drawings. I must note here that my adoration of Greek antiquity had led me to produce a number of figures drawn in charcoal on Ingres paper which, upon being placed near a flame, became suffused with the delicate tinge of ancient marble. I had also drawn some heads in red chalk in an attempt to capture some of the melancholy quality of Scopas' work — that 'powerful breath of inner life, but also pathos', as the architectural historian Tsoundas once described it.

These drawings depicted venerable, bearded figures, with serene and austere brows furrowed by deep thought. While they had no great value as works of art, they showed the beloved idols which peopled my imagination. For me, they summed up the ideal image of our ancestors, as it had been slowly nurtured in the minds of our people; a mythical image of heroic generations who had once dwelled in 'palaces' erected in an infinitely remote age.

I read Aeschylus, and my eyes would fill with tears as I recalled 'the distant land of the Hellenes'. I often visited natural history museums and studied the structure of skeletons, which I saw as the remnants of some primordial architecture containing the laws which governed all creation. The structure that ordered the spirals of the brain seemed to me a replica, a mirror-image of the principles which shaped the nebulae and galaxies of the universe and held together the harmony of the constellations. I worked incessantly to improve my drawing and sculpture, but sensed that the course I had embarked upon was an extremely long and arduous one. A while later, I happened to meet Bouzianis again. This time we became the closest of friends, and met every evening for endless discussions on art.

Of the painters whose work I became familiar with at the time, I especially admired the toil of Hans von Marées. His figures were rooted in the soil, seeming to rise upwards as if balancing the burden of colour they were made to carry. In his hieratic old men, one could almost discern 'the precious ointment upon the hand, that ran down the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments'.[2]

Three paintings by Cézanne, whose theory on the third dimension I was already familiar with, eventially led me to abandon Munich. This, I said to myself, is painting — true painting. And this is what drawing should be.

PARIS, 1909 TO EARLY 1912

I shall not say anything about this city, where the unbroken historical continuity of tradition has created what Rodin defined as 'the patient and silent merging of individual thought with the labour of generations'. Nor shall I speak about the various teachings — moral, spiritual and artistic — which may be extracted from this city and from the French race, provided that one is discerning enough to discover the secret virtues that lie hidden underneath the surface.

Mastering the meaning of art necessitates profound thought and subtle, intuitive gifts, if the initiate is to penetrate, albeit gradually and painfully, into the sanctuary where the inner truth will finally be revealed. This was the path along which I slowly progressed, using all the strength that was within me.

I experienced the most indescribable joy on hearing that Parthenis had arrived in Paris. 'I have yet to meet a teacher who has taught me more than you', I told him, and he replied, smiling with secret satisfaction, 'I don't doubt it'. I had the good fortune to visit in his company several museums and retrospective exhibitions of the French masters.

But as time went by, I began to grow impatient. I felt that the course I had chosen was a long one, much longer than my limited finances could possibly allow. Knowing that I would inevitably face heavy debts on my return to Greece, I made the difficult decision to

devote the rest of the year to architectural studies. I bought the necessary books and set out one day for my first session in an architectural studio. I feel no shame in mentioning this; it simply goes to show that the study of architecture was not in my nature; it was never among my central inclinations.

Architecture, as an object of aesthetic contemplation, had a certain attraction for me; I also gained a number of aesthetic and emotional insights through the study of spatial organization and plastic composition. However, this was quite a different matter from the complex theoretical approach towards construction involving materials and practical structural problems, and from the long apprenticeship that an architect has to go through. My readings from Guadet's *Eléments et théorie de l'architecture* not only helped me acquire a certain amount of knowledge on the subject, but also provided a kind of sentimental exploration of various times and places. Yet there were moments when I felt as if my spirit had become one of the innumerable, nameless stones buried in the deep foundations, the massive walls, the architraves and vaults of the buildings I contemplated.

I spent some time at Chifflot's studio, and could even say that my architectural apprenticeship earned me a fair amount of praise. I began to believe that I could embark upon my new course of action with a certain degree of confidence and courage. As for my other interests, I hoped that through my own studies I would gradually fill in the remaining gaps, and I was proved right.

One day, towards the end of my stay in Paris, I was riding in a bus past the Place de la Concorde on my way back to the hotel in the Latin Quarter when De Chirico got on and sat in the seat right opposite mine. We greeted each other warmly, and straight away he said that he ascribed a deep significance to apparently chance encounters such as this — a metaphysical significance not unlike that which the ancient Greeks found in their omens... He mentioned Arnold Böcklin, saying he was the only true metaphysical painter, as Nietzsche had also observed. I replied that the universal theories and ideals relating to art were of primary importance, of course, but that the valid symbolic expression of these ideals through the medium of art was equally important. De Chirico went on to say that one autumn day, under a limpid sky, he went into an antique shop by some bubbling fountains and discovered the text of Nietzsche's theory of the eternal return; an enigmatic concept of the cosmos which he later found corroborated in Heraclitus. These things had inspired a new series of works which he invited me to his house to see. I was thus the first artist in Paris he showed them to. There was a self-portrait in which he had used a technique which could immediately be seen as the only appropriate one for conveying this ideal; such was its simplicity, its restraint, its direct relevance to the eternal, transcending all ephemeral elements. In it, the artist wore black and was deeply immersed in the contemplation of his inner visions. He stood in an opening against a cold, translucent, greenish-blue sky. At the bottom of the picture was the inscription: *Quid Amabo Nisi Quod Aenigma Est.*

In some of his other works, the delicate line that separated light from shade on rain-drenched soil was equally mysterious. In one, there was a tall building with a clock telling the time. I also remember a picture in which the half-glimpsed mast of a ship conveyed the mystery of departure, exile ... heavily marked by the shadow of destiny. Enigmatic, too, the vaults and arcades, the statue of Ariadne touched by the autumn light. All the paintings had the same limpid autumn sky.

'Latin is the language that can best express these mysteries', De Chirico said. 'And the same is true of Roman architecture. Rome is the true home of the mysteries...'

A few days later, I received a letter from him, written in Greek. It began: 'Honoured Friend, I feel the need to see you and talk to you, because something entirely new has happened in my life.' I am not able to register in detail here my reaction to this letter, but after that, we met several times, and spent many hours discussing the new light that his metaphysical theory shed upon life. I even postponed my departure from Paris for a while. When my last evening came, I had dinner with the artist and his mother. Reality struck me as insignificant and vulgar in the apocalyptic light of his exalted theory.

I left Paris the next day.

As the boat reached the port of Patras, my eyes were struck by the cold, dazzling whiteness of a piece of marble lying in the mud. Such was its impact against the things surrounding it that I thought: 'Now I will have to revise everything I have learned up till now'.

In Piraeus one day, as I was returning to my father's house, I was intensely aware of the sun scorching my skin; then I stepped into the shade and the coolness caused me to shiver... It occurred to me at that moment that the violent constrasts in the climate of our land, experienced over many centuries, probably helped to explain the sharp antitheses in the character of our race. The ancient Greeks, I considered, had subjected these antitheses to the discipline of their austere architecture — their cornices, friezes and architraves.

Two days later, among the slums of a working-class quarter of Piraeus, I came upon the actual embodiment of this kind of antithesis: the acute angle made by a lean-to roof at the point where it met the wall behind it. These observations led me to abandon conventional learning and follow a free, autonomous course dictated by nature. Ever since then, the need for combining what the poet Solomos defines as *il commune* and *il proprio* became my most persistent pursuit.

1912-1920

My real friendships — friendships of the spirit — all date back to this period, which was marked by war campaigns, troop mobilization and military disasters. These included Alibertis, Bournias, Apostolakis and, at a later date, the Politis family. It was around this time that Apostolakis' book *Criticism and Poetry* was first published. Apostolakis has been called a negative spirit, but where did his bitter, agonizing nihilism originate if not in his soul's deep yearning for poetry, in his noble concept of the nature of art? His spiritual impact on all of us was considerable; he bestowed on us the greatest benefits a man can give his fellow-men... Then there were the others: Kondoglou and Papaloukas, the architect Mitsakis, the poet Stratis Doukas, Velmos; and the younger generation of Ghikas, Tsarouchis, Engonopoulos, Diamandopoulos. How fruitful and instructive it was to experience at close quarters the interplay of constrasting attitudes and values which these men represented. I have no idea what I might have offered them in return, but I am fully conscious of my debt to each one of them.

However, I would now like to recall the brief and rare intervals when I was able to enjoy a certain degree of isolation and devote myself to painting. I went alone to the island of Aegina, in the blissful state of one who has been granted the privilege of 'returning to the godhead', even though this bliss was tinged with the bitterness of an uncertain future. But let me quote here some half-effaced lines which I wrote in those days: 'Olive tree, are you the sacred tree? Is it you

men spoke of in times long past as being invested with the purest essence, the very essence of light? Tell me, why is your holy trunk so sorely tormented? Are these contortions perhaps the outward signs of your striving towards the spiritual principle, of which you are the living incarnation? ... Are you the vine mentioned in the Scriptures? I kneel and kiss the soil that nourishes you. See, it is furrowed and cracked by the flame of the sun... But you transmute the flame into a divine breath of coolness...'

For a long time I used to go and paint on the banks of the Cephisus river, down by the Sepolia, in the pine grove that was part of the Soutsos estate. I wanted to put into practice all the theory I had learned from Cézanne's technique. I wanted to work out for myself the visual revolution he had brought about, the shift from the established technique of his age to the new third dimension, achieved through colour, the quest for pure chromatic antithesis. The way was difficult, but is there anything that will not yield to human perseverance? Every day I made imperceptible progress until I was able to render this third dimension in a fairly satisfactory way. I was reminded of the painter Lytras, who compared talent to a 'small brook which suddenly disappears into the ground, but soon re-emerges and gushes forth forcefully'. Then I realized that it is one thing to grasp a technical principle with one's reason, and another thing entirely to know how to put it into effect. This musical technique, if I may call it such, with its intensely dramatic character, both attracted and delighted me. I like painting in solitude, not only because one is often unwilling to expose one's weaknesses to others, but because art is for me a religious act, an act of veneration and worship of Mother Nature, whose sanctity may be offended by the ignorance of the multitude. This is why I usually went to the pine grove alone; it was my sanctuary. If I went with someone, it was with Steris, who felt the same as I did and fully respected those moments of religious dedication.

One day a German professor of music at the Athens Conservatory saw us at work and remarked to a mutual friend: 'I saw two artists in the pine grove, and I suddenly felt the urge to play my cello to them'. Since then, I have always associated some colours — greens, crimsons — with the deeper tones of music.

Art is obedient to the eternal laws of the universe. Leafing through my papers, I came upon a prose-poem called 'Piety' which begins like this: 'You have set down ubiquitous laws, O Lord, suffer me to follow them, suffer me not to make them profane'. It was written long ago. May the reader forgive its clumsiness.

I built my first house in 1923. It was in the Tzitzifies quarter, on the left bank of the Ilyssus river. Photos Politis praised it in three articles in the Athens daily *Politia*.

The second house I built (in 1925) was at No.1 Heracleiou Street, in the Patissia district. It was inspired by Orlandos' painting of an ancient house in Priene. When I first saw that painting, I said to myself: 'This is a pure, essentially Greek house, free of any elements indicative of a specific time or place.' The square windows, the oblong openings serving as supports and lintels, the absence of a cornice — all these devices were closely related to contemporary architectural solutions, but they were also to be found in our own popular tradition.

When I became familiar with the Modern Movement, I felt instinctively close to it. If the more perceptive minds among us accepted and embraced the Modern Movement at that time, it was for the following reasons: it promised to become the embodiment of organic truth; it was austere, and fundamentally simple; it was governed by a geometry that conveyed a universal design capable of symbolizing our age.

The Lycabettus School was built in 1933, but as soon as it was completed, I found it did not satisfy me. It occurred to me then that the universal spirit had to be coupled with the spirit of nationhood; and this led me to make buildings like the Experimental School in Thessalonica (1935), the apartment block on Heyden Street, Athens (1938) — for which Mitsakis produced the ground-plan — and the house for the sculptress Phrosso Efthimiades (1949).

My later work, on which I collaborated with my son-in law, Alexander Papageorgiou, was also influenced by these tendencies: this included the house in Philothei (1954), the Xenia Hotel in Delphi (1955), the Aixoni housing project and the pavilion at St Dimitris Loumbardiaris on the Philopappou Hill (1957).

My only reason for listing these works is to indicate to any critic who cares to examine them that they represent a continuous, determined effort to further elaborate the very ideal I had conceived right at the beginning of my adult life. This is only natural, since the principles upon which these works are based are immutable. I have restated them only to deepen and enrich their meaning, both for my own and for other people's sake. As far as I am concerned, however, I never really felt as though I was repeating myself; rather, I had the impression that I was rediscovering these fundamental principles all over again. If there are any errors in the works I have produced, it is due to my own mistaken interpretation and not to any faults in the principles themselves.

I feel, however, that I cannot conclude this piece without mentioning one final point: my self-training in the technique of Cézanne led me away from the ideals of the Western world. The East and Byzantium revealed to me that the creation of a symbolic idiom abstracted from nature and from the material of mimesis is the only valid and spiritually worthwhile way to convey our feelings about life.

Somebody once said, quite rightly, that the whole future course of Hellenism would depend on our ability to assume a responsible position at the place where the East and the West meet. I will add this: it will also depend on the appropriate synthesis of opposed currents and tendencies, on their fusion into a new form. I could easily analyse the implications of this for architecture, but let it suffice here for me to say that I am a confirmed Easterner.

Looking back on what I have written here about my life, I contemplate and I, like the poet Cavafy, read 'the inscription on this ancient stone', with its 'badly mutilated' letters, desires and hopes, joy and grief, and I am filled with wonder and admiration at how many tears, then 'tears again', men 'of mortal body and immortal soul' are destined to shed before they can achieve spiritual fulfilment. These 'foul, unceasing' sufferings gradually fashion his spiritual being, in time permeating his works with a mysticism like the 'morning breeze'...

Young people, discard individual will and descend into the trough of obedience. This, and this alone, will grant you true freedom. Do not slacken or lie idle, for it is written that we may eventually be forgiven for not having been able to accomplish something, but never forgiven for not having tried.

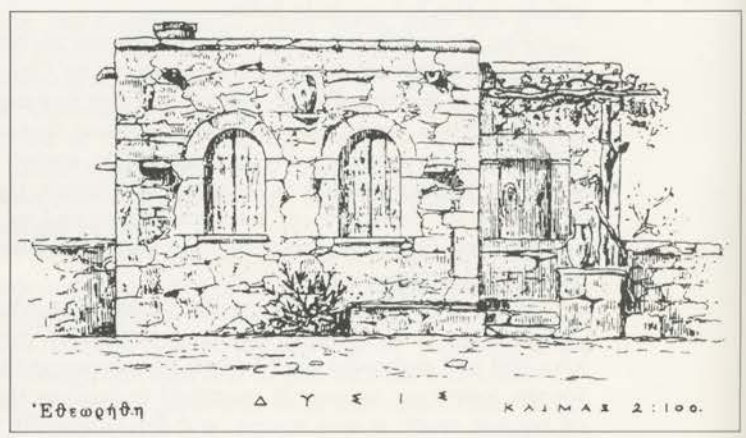
Notes

1. Translated by Louis MacNeice.
2. From the *Song of the Steps*.

SELECTED PROJECTS 1923-65

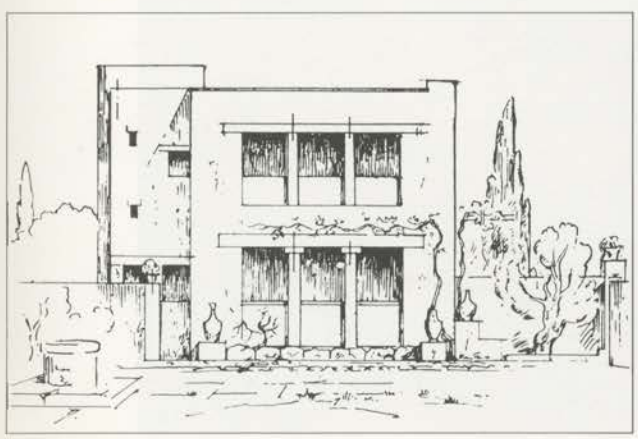
Early Works	38
Elementary School, Athens 1932	40
Experimental School, Thessalonica 1935	42
Studio House for Phrosso Efthimiades, Athens 1949	44
Potamianos House, Athens 1954	46
St Dimitris Loumbardiaris Church and Pavilion, Athens 1951-7	50
Children's Playground, Athens 1960-5	58
Aixoni Prototype Housing, Athens 1950-4	62
Xenia Hotel, Delphi 1951-4	64

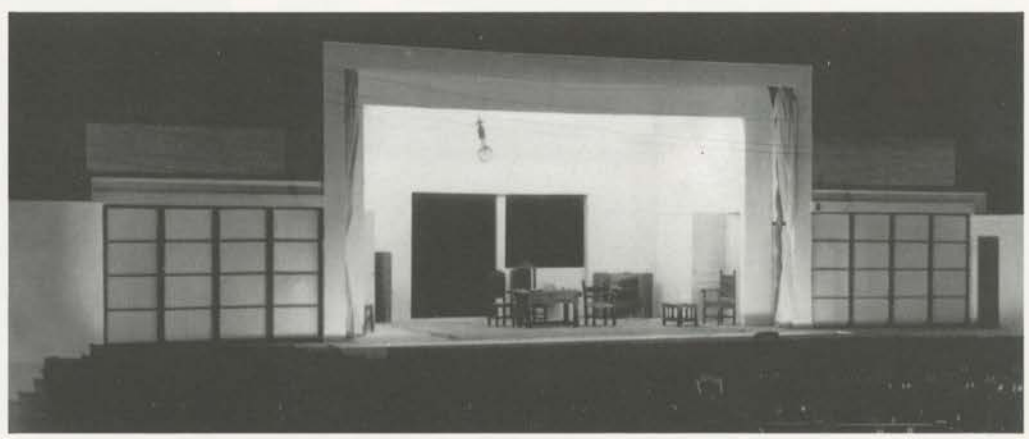
Below from left to right:
Moraitis House, Athens 1921-3
Moraitis House, Athens 1921-3
Karamanos House, Athens 1925
Open Air Theatre, Athens 1933



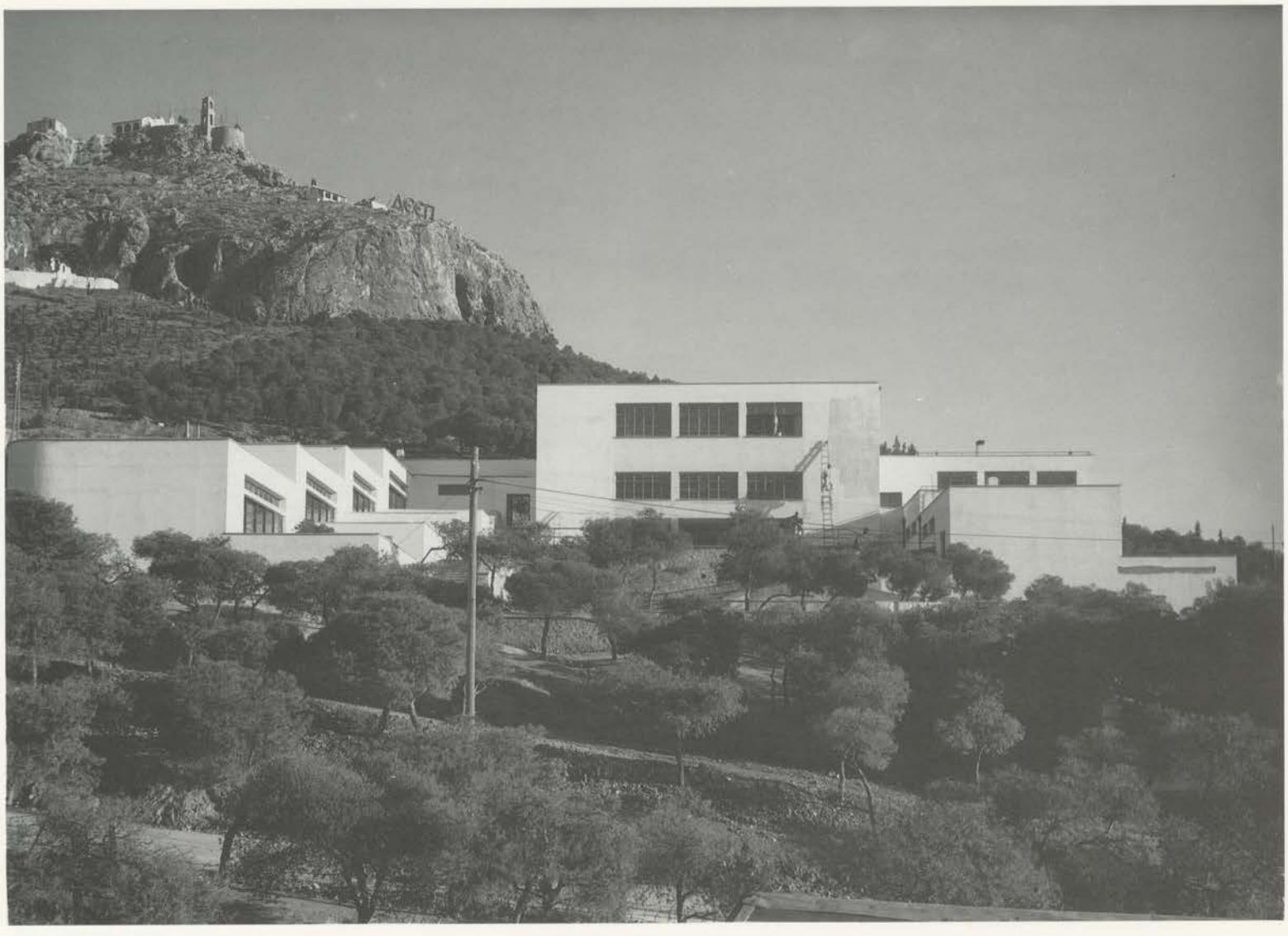
The stage should not present any chaos, illusion or picturesqueness behind the proscenium, but rather an architecture of space; abstract and stable for each performance.

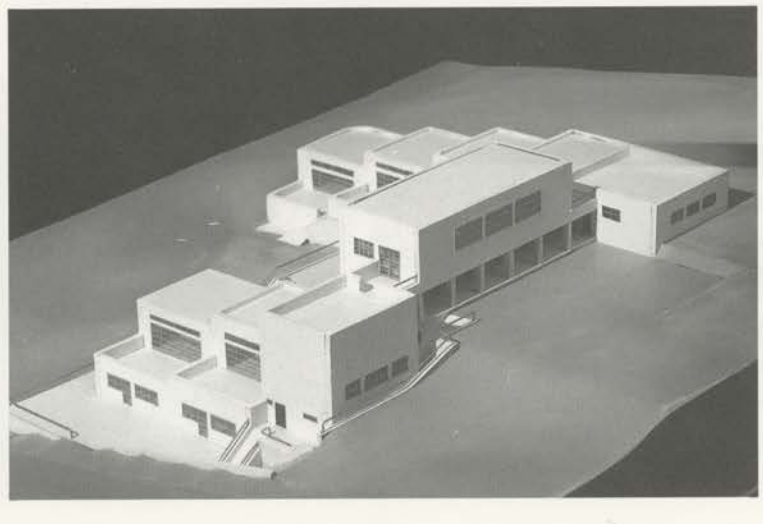
Dimitris Pikionis



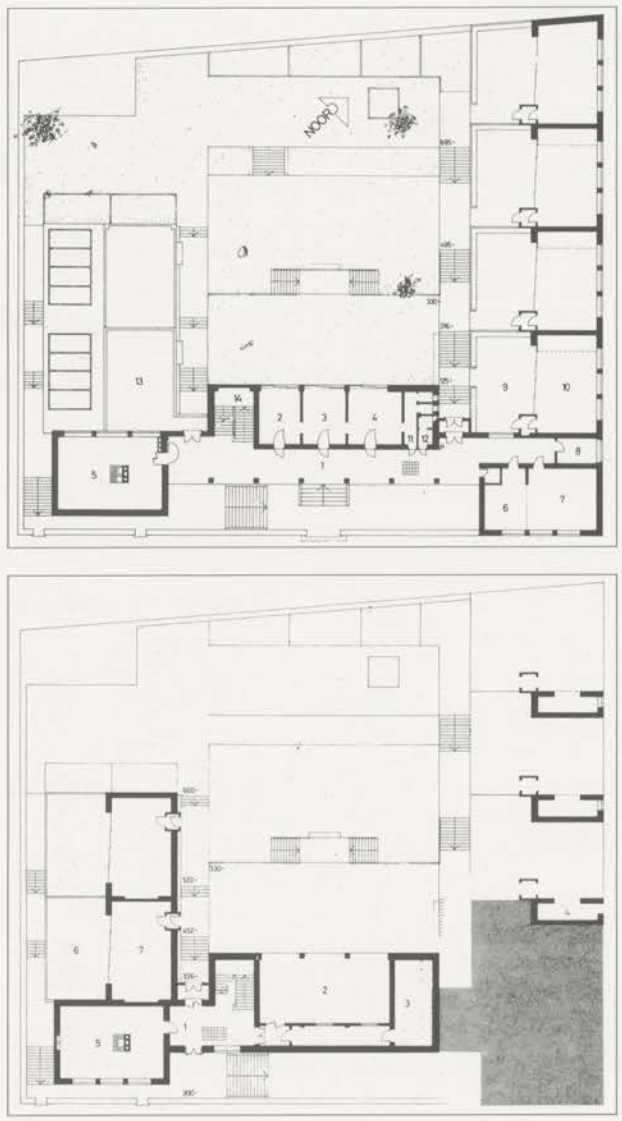


ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LYCABETTUS HILL, ATHENS 1933





In Pikionis' work, the boundaries are ... never sharp and irrevocable. In the Athens school, the landscape penetrates the building and the plan and its surroundings are interwoven. The various elements in the school (the classrooms and assembly halls) are independent of each other, but there is a mutual relationship between them.

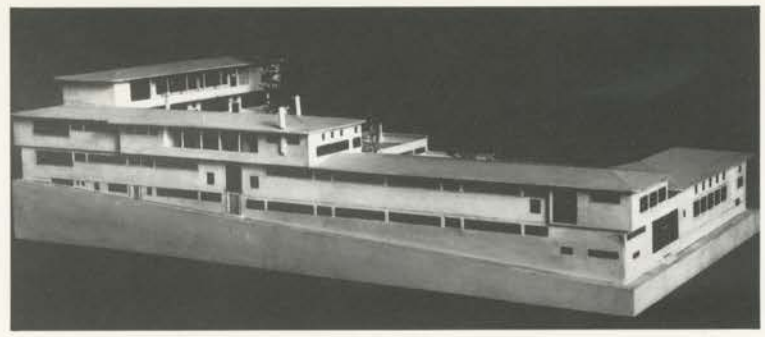


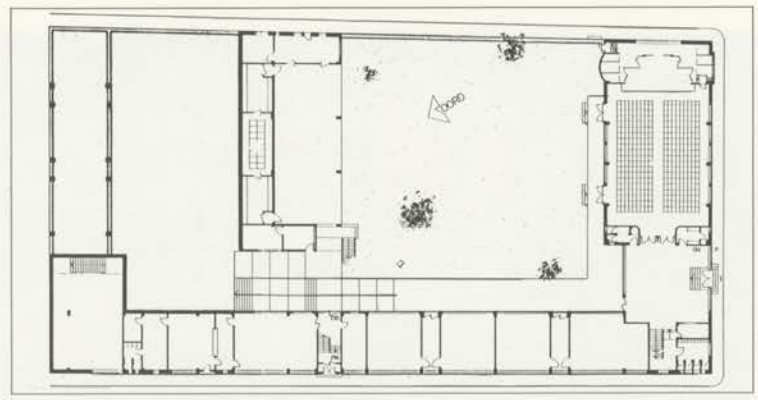
Both the junior school in Athens and the experimental school in Thessalonica (see pages 42-3) resulted from the building programme of the liberal government of Venizelos (1928–33)... which foresaw the building of 4,000 schools, almost three times as many as had been built since the Greek state became independent in 1821.

This task was entrusted to a group of enthusiastic and able young architects, almost all of whom supported the idea of functionalism in this period of accelerated activity. In addition to Pikionis, this group (known as 'Omada'*), included architects such as Mitsakis, Valentis, Panagiotakos and the CIAM members Despotopoulos, Kazantinos and Papadakis, all co-operating and working alongside each other. Together they have left behind such a large number of buildings of high quality that one justly wonders why they have never received the international acclaim they deserve...*

Emile Chlimintzas

EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOL
THESSALONICA 1935





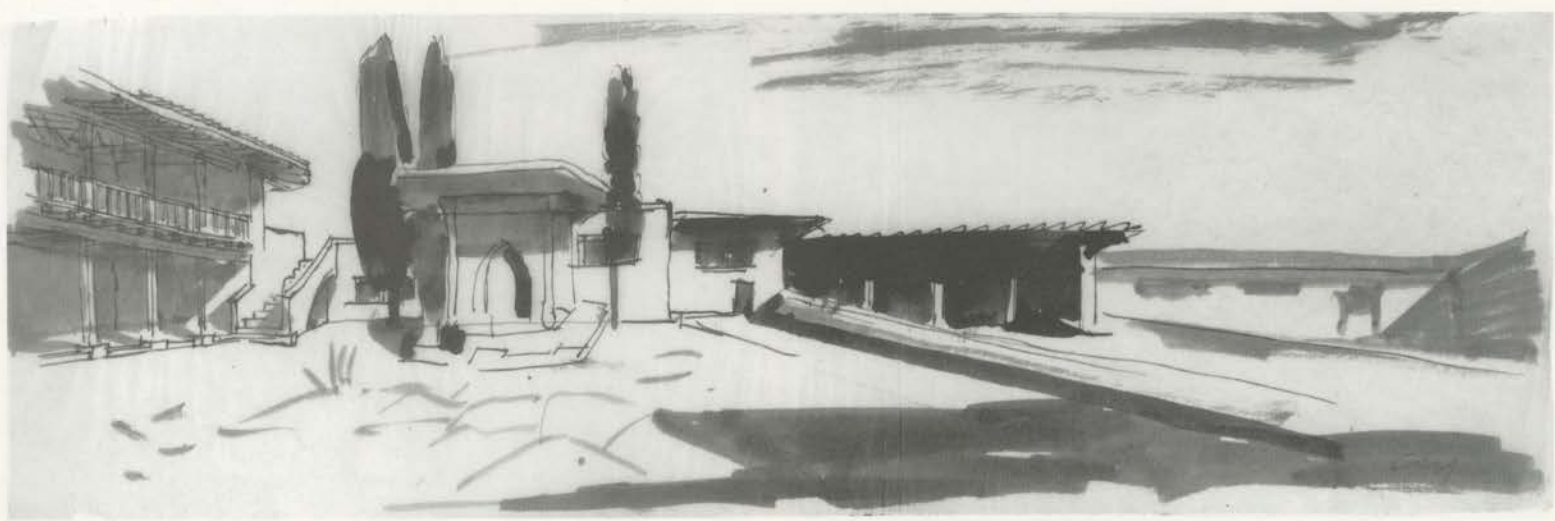
For both schools Pikionis started out with the same basic brief as his colleagues but he examined additional factors such as access, climate and the dimensions to be used. The school at Thessalonica can be regarded as a further development of the one at Athens. In Athens the school is penetrated by the landscape; in Thessalonica by the town.

There is a painting by Pikionis, one of his 'Nature' series entitled 'Santorini', which shows a number of cubes dancing through a volcanic landscape. The white stuccoed school in Athens (in spite of its closeness to the forms of the International Style) is modified to suit the local climate and built with local materials: it relates to the architecture of the latitudes of the Cyclades.

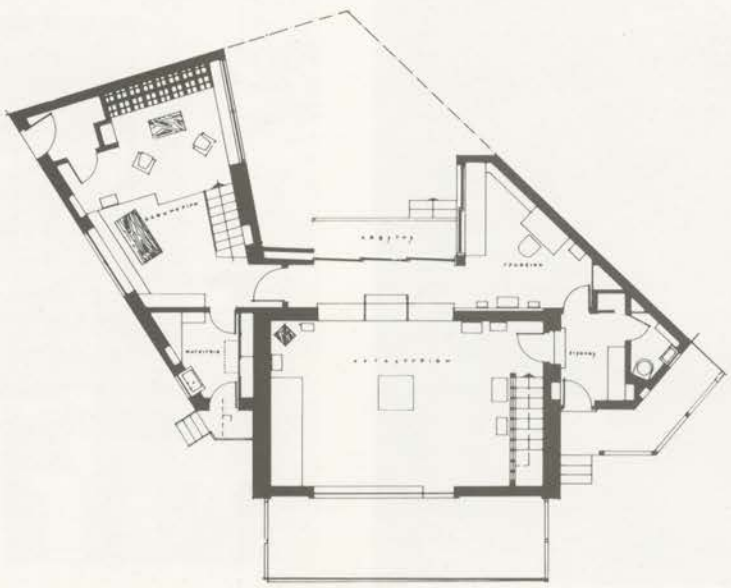
In Thessalonica, Pikionis reacted differently in face of the densely-wooded Macedonian landscape, where the damper climate has produced an architecture more comparable to that of Tuscany. The traditional dwellings of the region have shallow-pitched roofs and long overhangs.

One of the strongest qualities of the building is the way in which the climate is controlled by natural means. It is a 'healthy' school, sunny in winter and shaded during the warmer seasons. Pikionis' continuous attention to ecological factors is possibly the most important feature of this school.

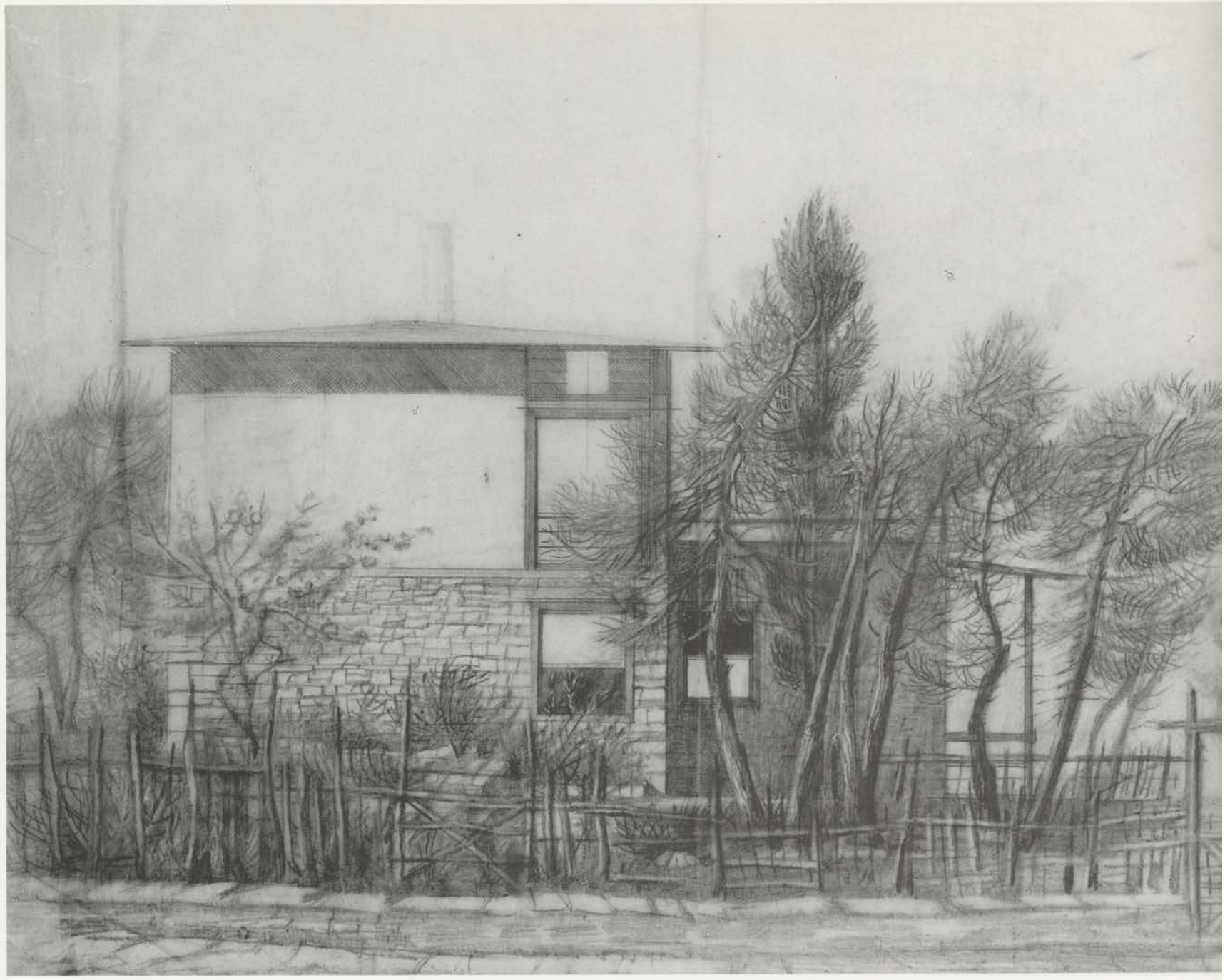
Emile Chlimintzas



STUDIO FOR PHROSSO EFTHIMIADES
PATISSIA, ATHENS 1949



In plan, the studio is not unlike the irregular peasant houses Pikionis encountered in the countryside. The sequential unfolding of the interior space and the hierarchical disposition of the studio volume are characteristic of his work of this period.

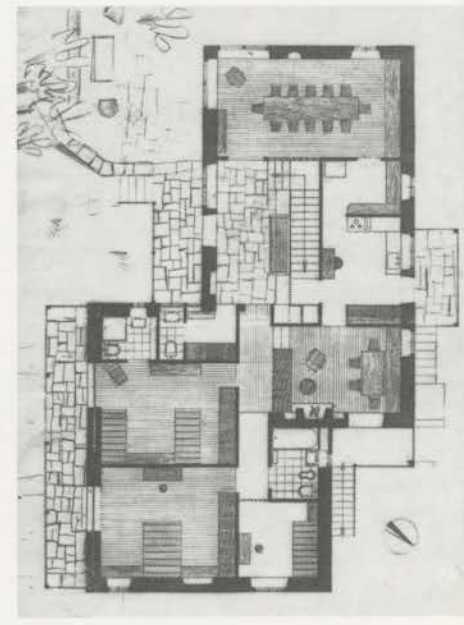


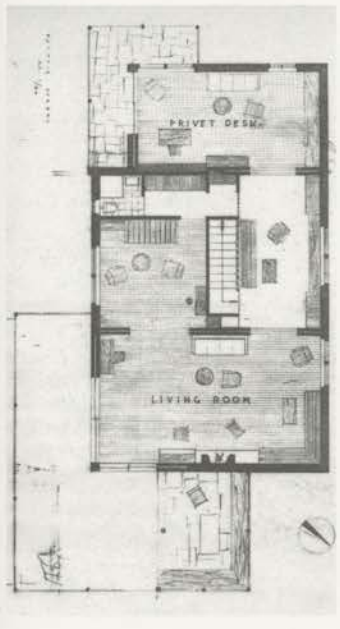
HOUSE FOR POTAMIANOS

PHILOTHEI, ATHENS 1954

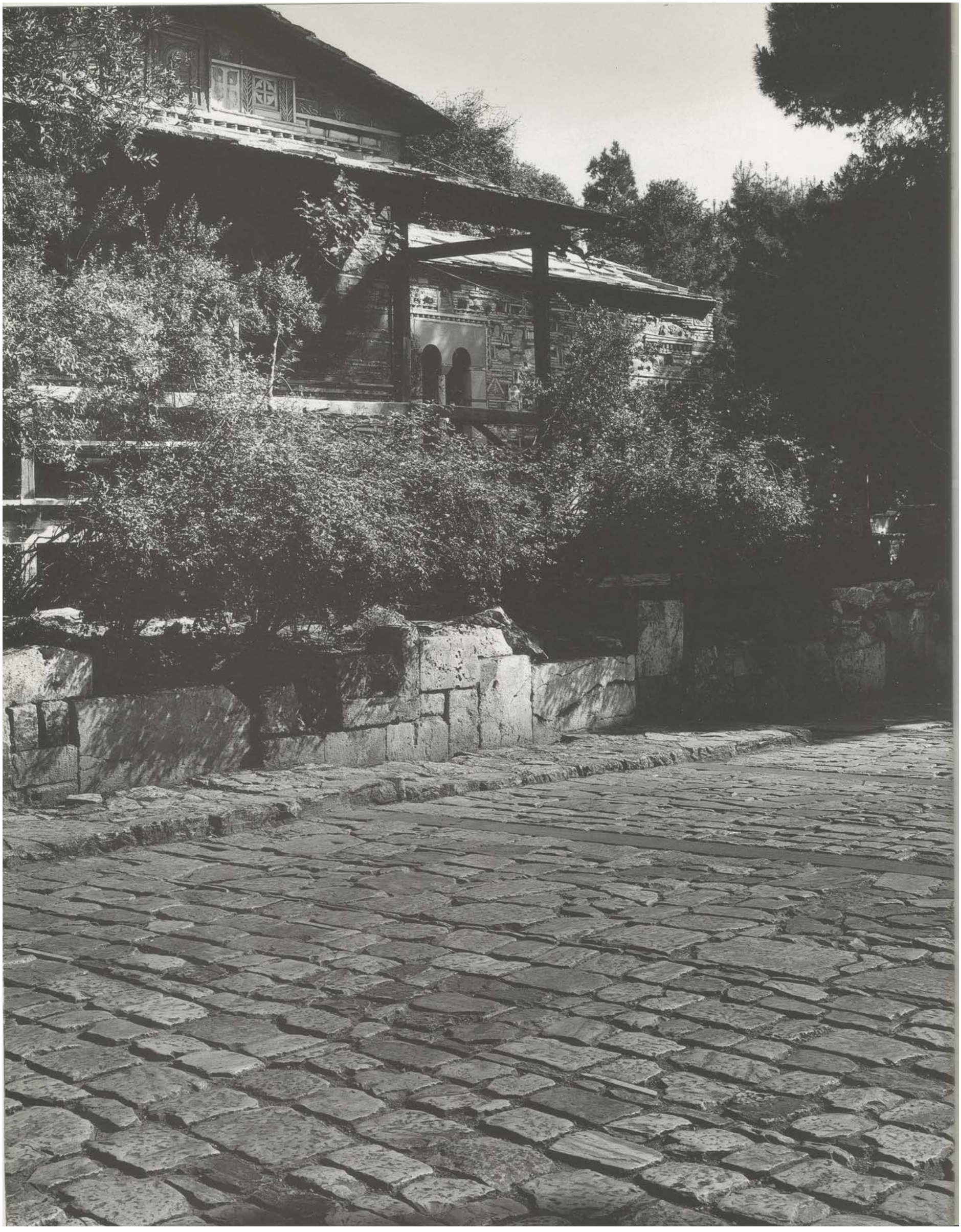
With *Alexander* and *Ino Papageorgiou*

The Potamianos House in Philothei, Athens is a continuation of Pikionis' interest in combining traditional materials with a contemporary structure. The site is organized as a temenos entered through a propylon and landscaped with indigenous plants, characteristic paving arrangements, stone benches and assemblies of archaic fragments. The section is organized along traditional lines with living spaces and studio above and bedrooms and kitchen below.




PRIVET DESM
LIVING ROOM

Opposite and above:
the decorative motifs employed by Pikionis in the dining room on the ground level and the overmantel in the living room.

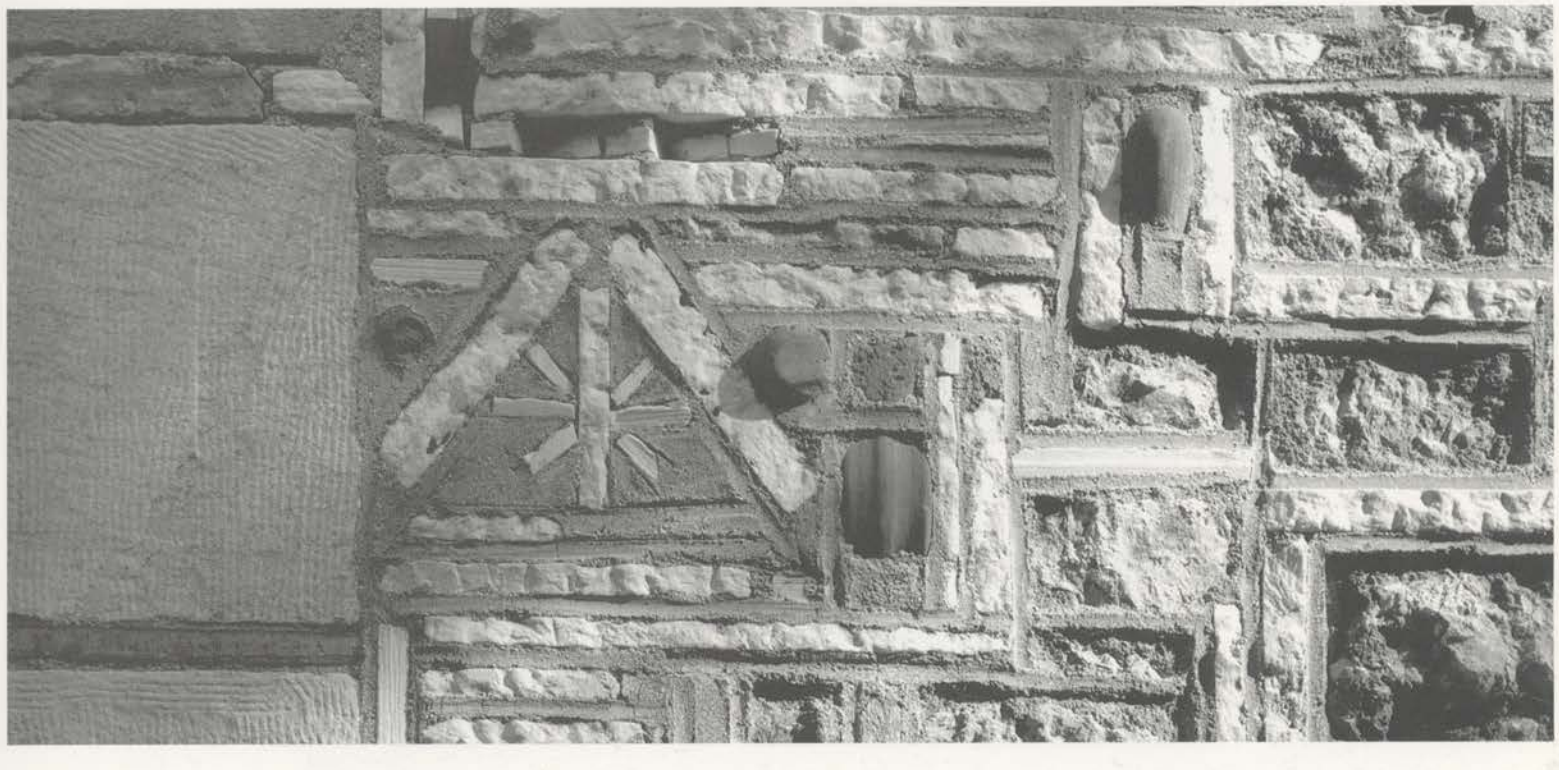


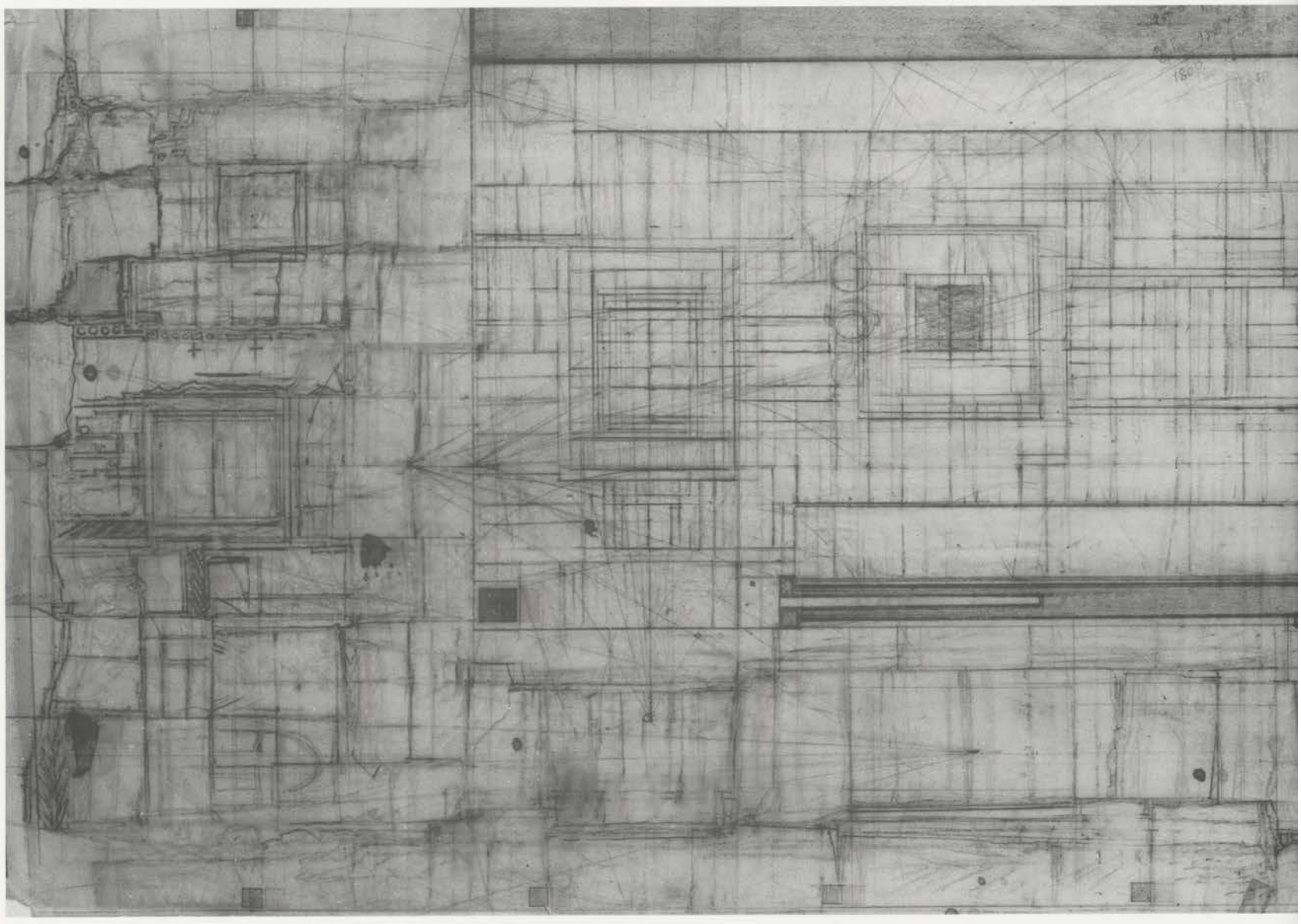
ST DIMITRIS LOUMBARDIARIS CHURCH AND PAVILION

ATHENS 1951-7

With *Alexander Papageorgiou*

In 1951-7, Pikionis was entrusted with the task of landscaping the area around the Acropolis and Philopappou Hill. As part of the project, he renovated the existing church of St Dimitris Loumbardiaris and constructed a new pavilion adjacent to it.

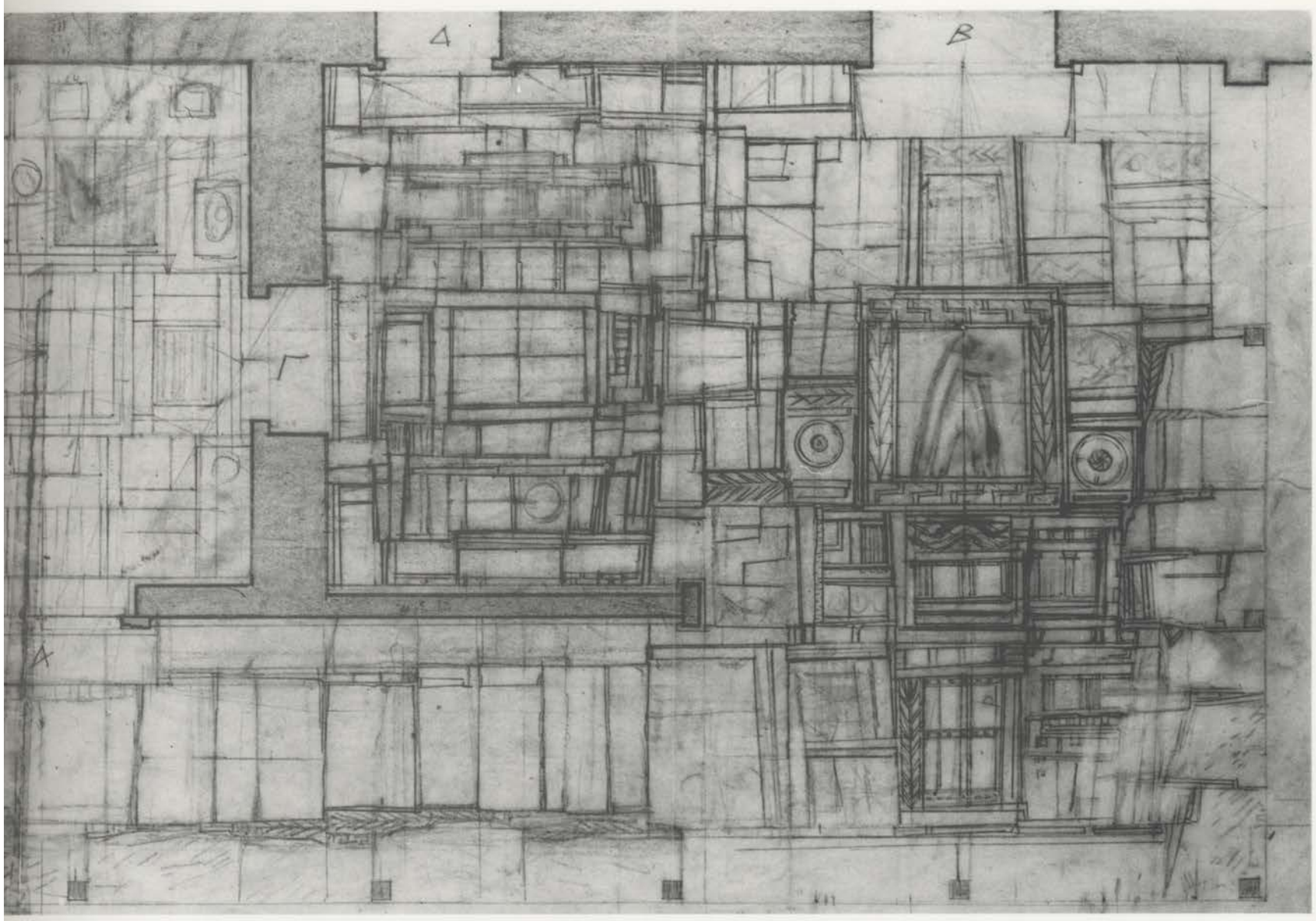




Above:
floor patterning in St Dimitris Loumbardiaris pavilion enclosure

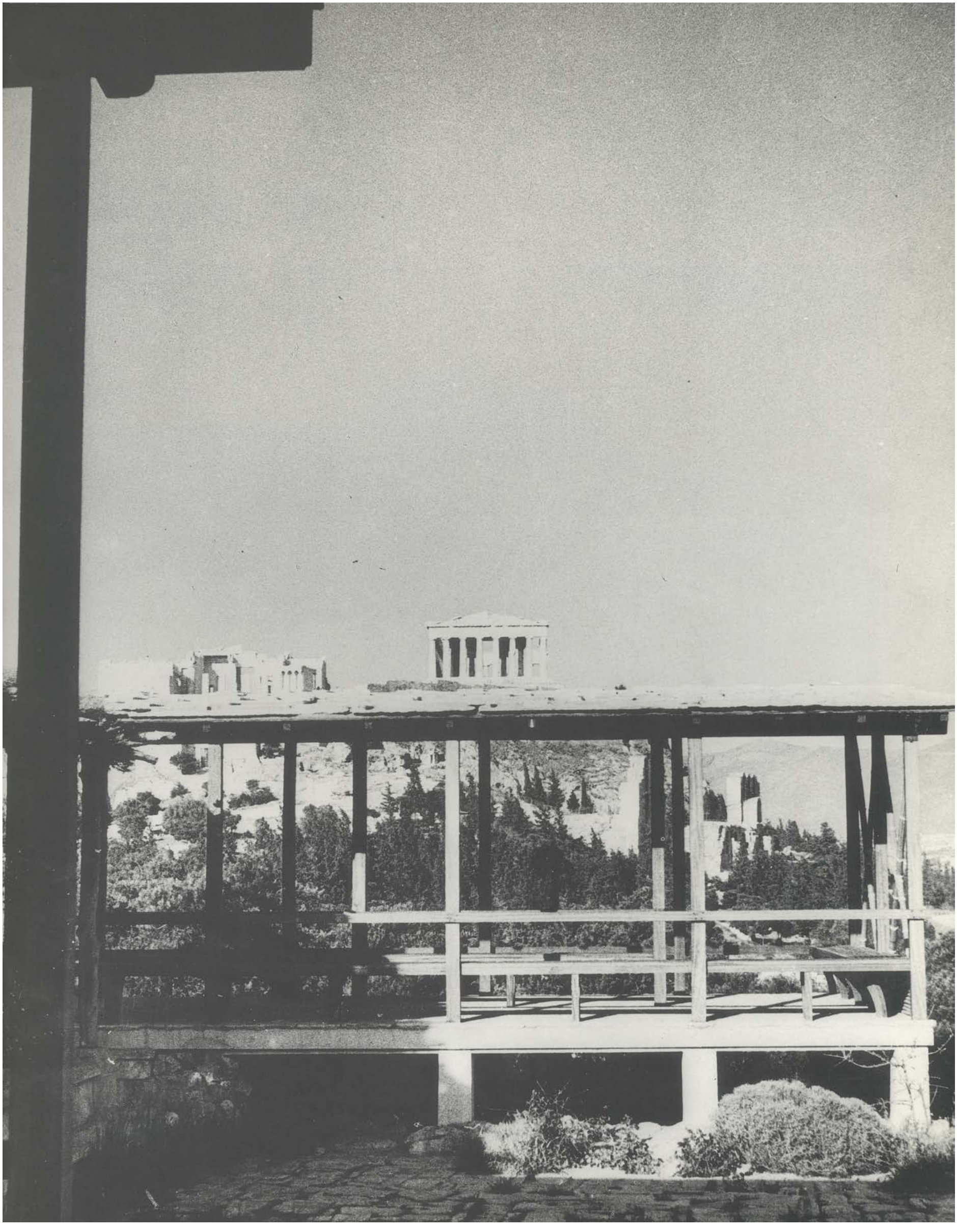
Right:
plan of St Dimitris Loumbardiaris complex
A. church, B. pavilion, C. entry porch

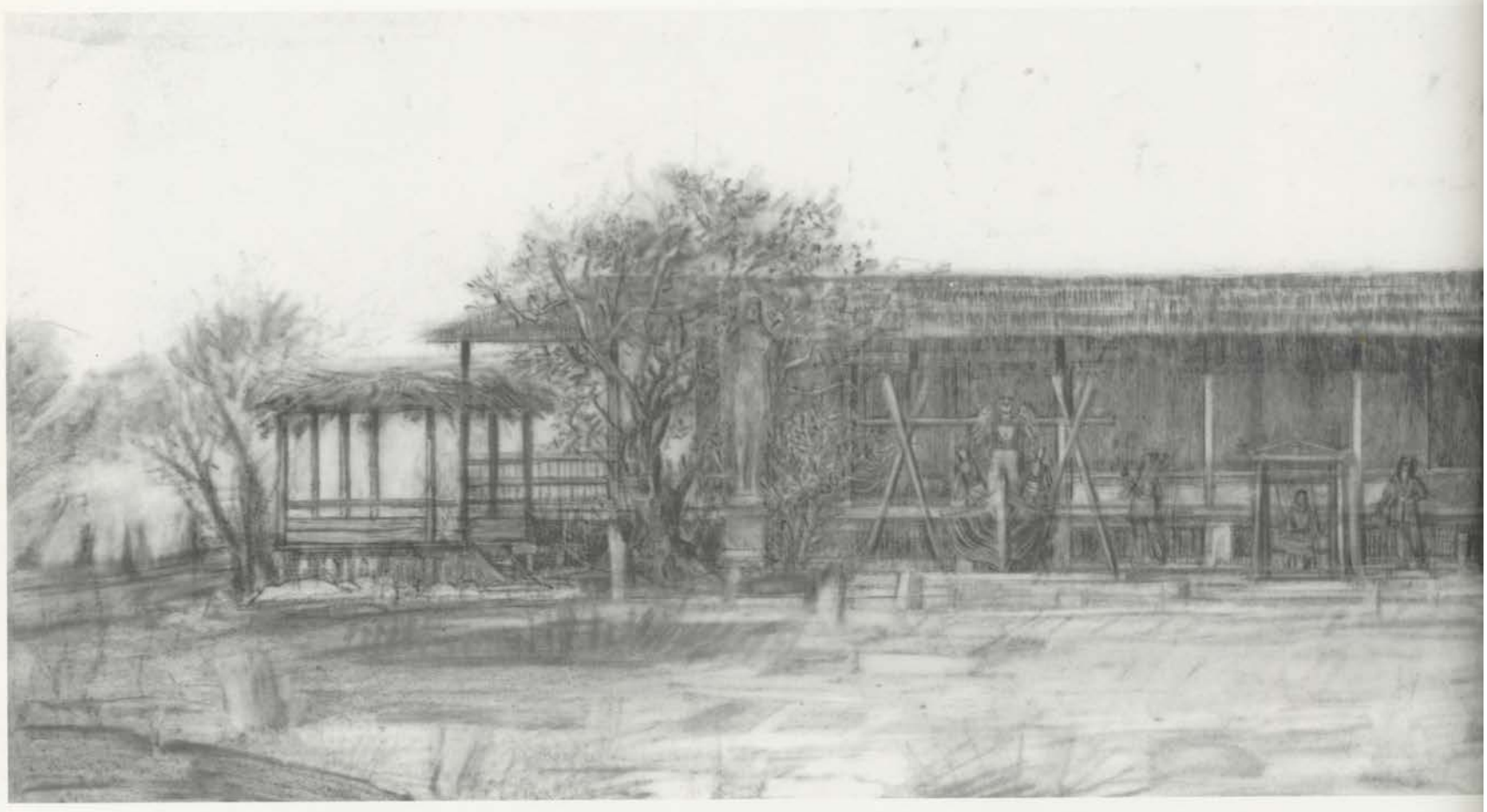
Far right:
plan of route up Philopappou Hill


A
B

Above:
view across pavilion enclosure towards entry porch and church

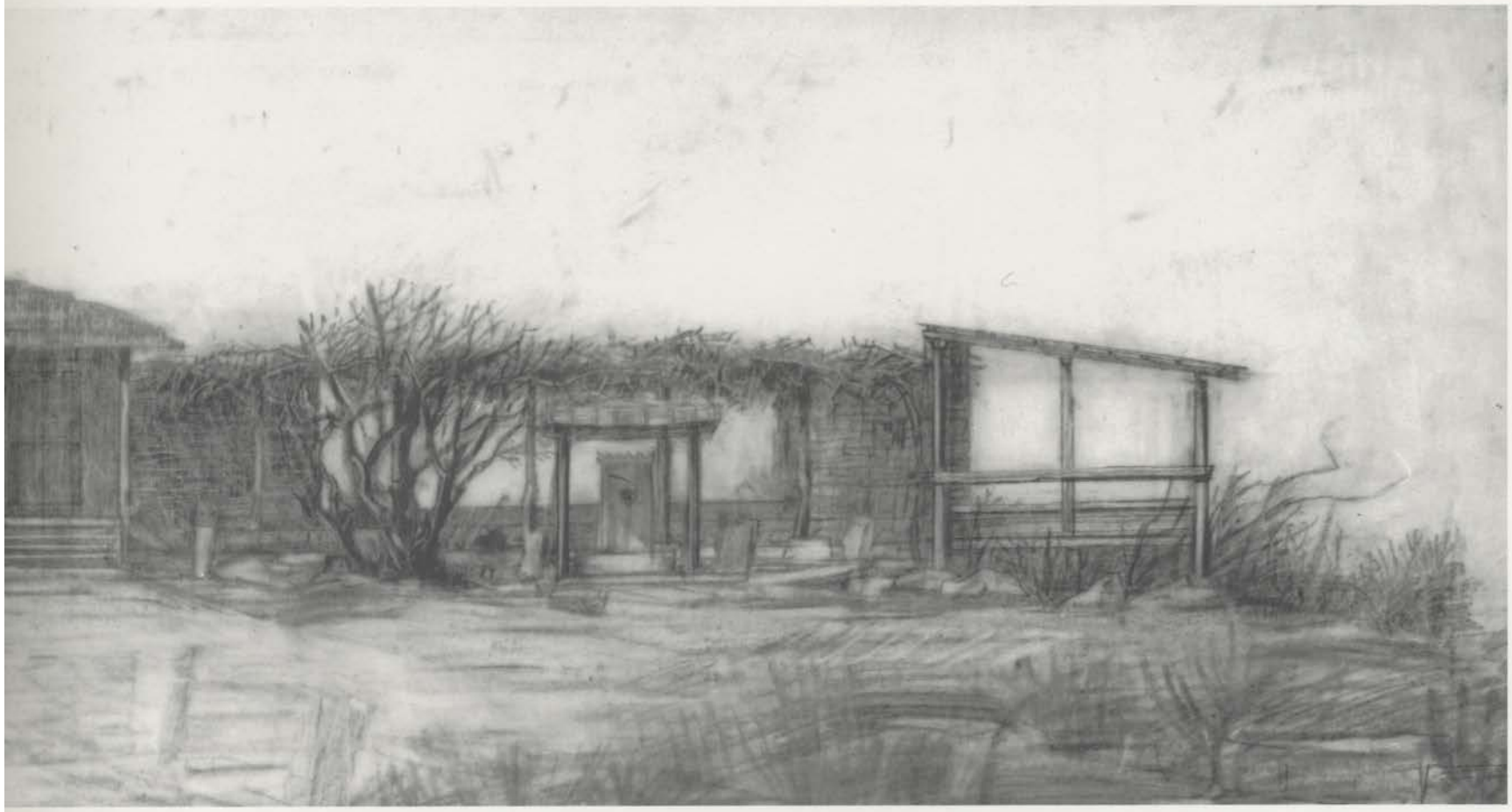
Opposite:
view of pavillion deck





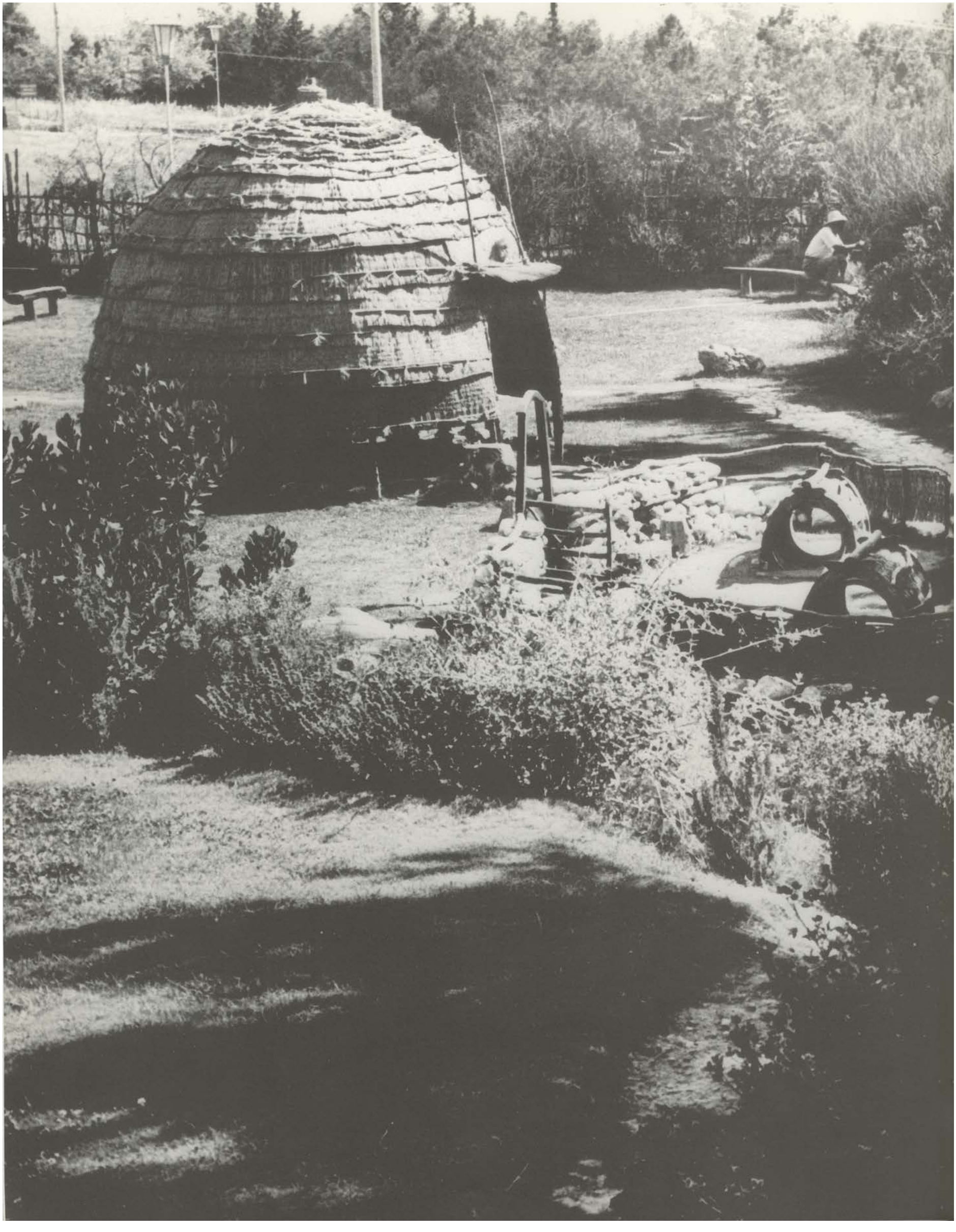
Above:
sketch of facade of St Dimitris Loumbardiaris pavilion

Right:
views of pavilion from entry porch

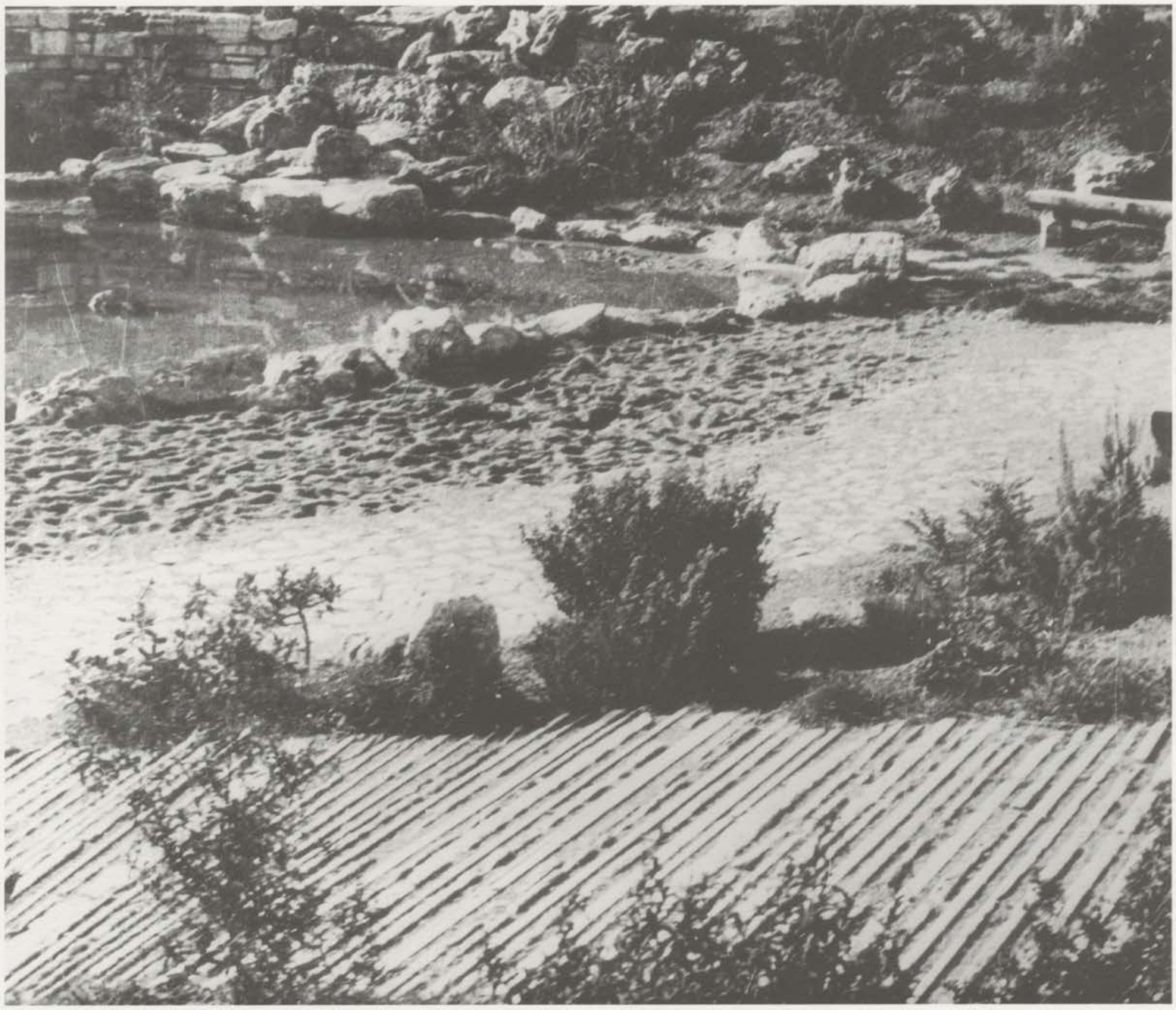


The underlying sense of mysticism in Pikionis' work stems from his deep religious faith, apparent in his drawings of 'Hagiographies' where there is an insight towards a 'spirit' and a 'God'; in the iconographic images that form the paths up to the Acropolis and Philopappou; and in the monastic theme for the synthesis of the Church of St Dimitris Loumbardiaris and the adjoining pavilion. The assemblage of these structures creates a sense of enclosure similar to that of a monastery. The pavilion protects the central space from its northern face. It was intended to be a place of rest and meditation away from the distracting bustle of the city. The long, narrow benches at the south end of the church are similar to those found in monasteries.

Alexandra Papageorgiou



CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND
PHILOTHEI, ATHENS 1960-5



The children's playground was built between 1960 and 1965 in Philothei, a northern suburb of Athens, on the edge of a pine wood opposite some free-standing houses.

The playground is enclosed but not cut off from its surroundings and is, in effect, a 'collage' of existing and new elements: the porch, small theatre, thatched hut, waterfall, pond, bridge, wrecked ship, second entranceway and fountain.

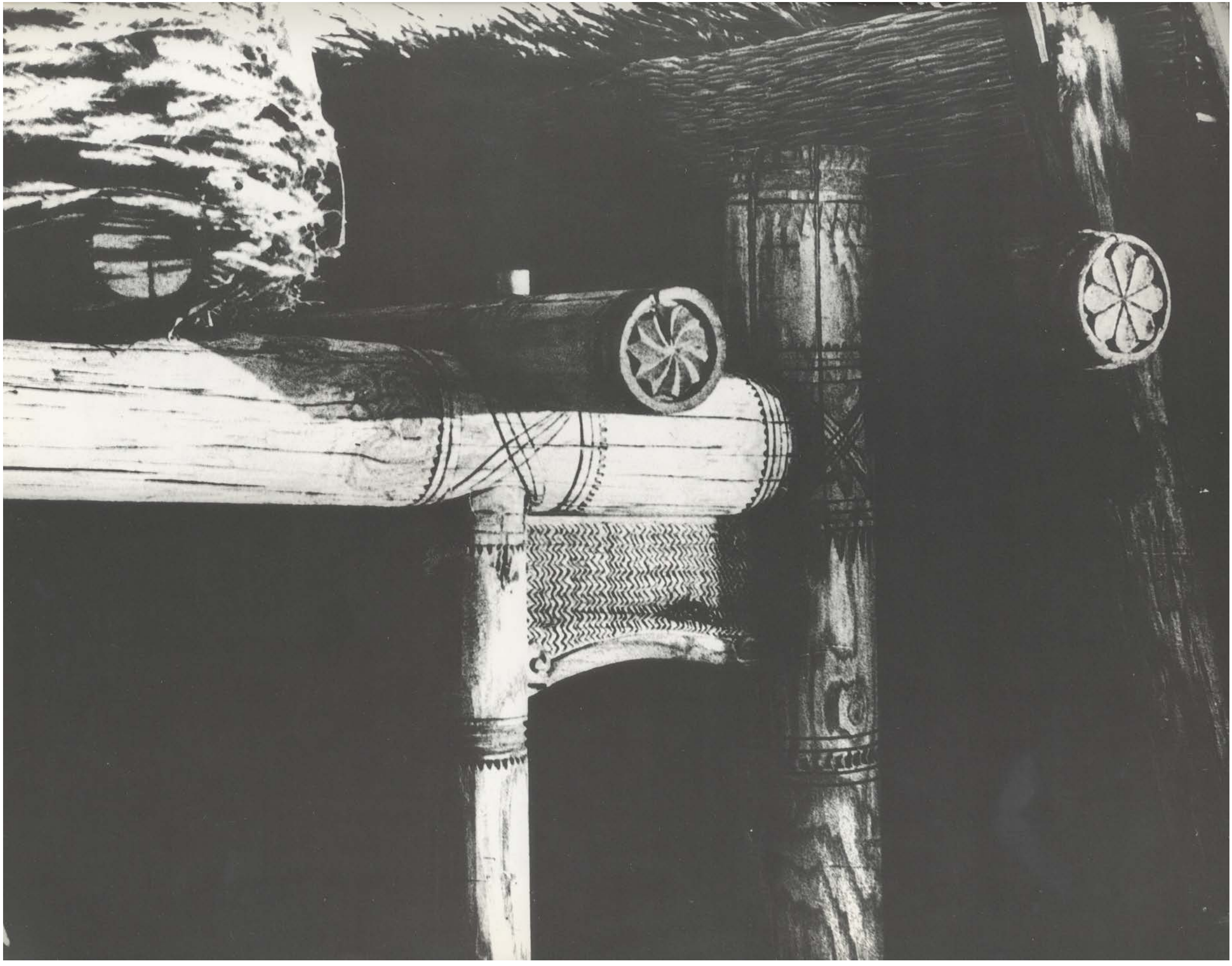
The front porch, or propylon, is very transparent, a transition both to the outside beyond the steps and to the playground

itself. It is made from the simple materials which man has used since primeval times – timber and dried reeds – and is covered by a tympanon-like timber roof with ornamentation reminiscent of Japan and the Far East.

The site, which is partly flat, partly sloping, partly paved, partly grassed, was formerly a ravine. It has been metamorphosed into one of the finest of playgrounds. It is interesting to note that the site is unobtrusively enclosed on two of its sides (where traffic and noise are at their worst) and on the third side is opened up panoramically and gradually merges into the adjoining pine woods.

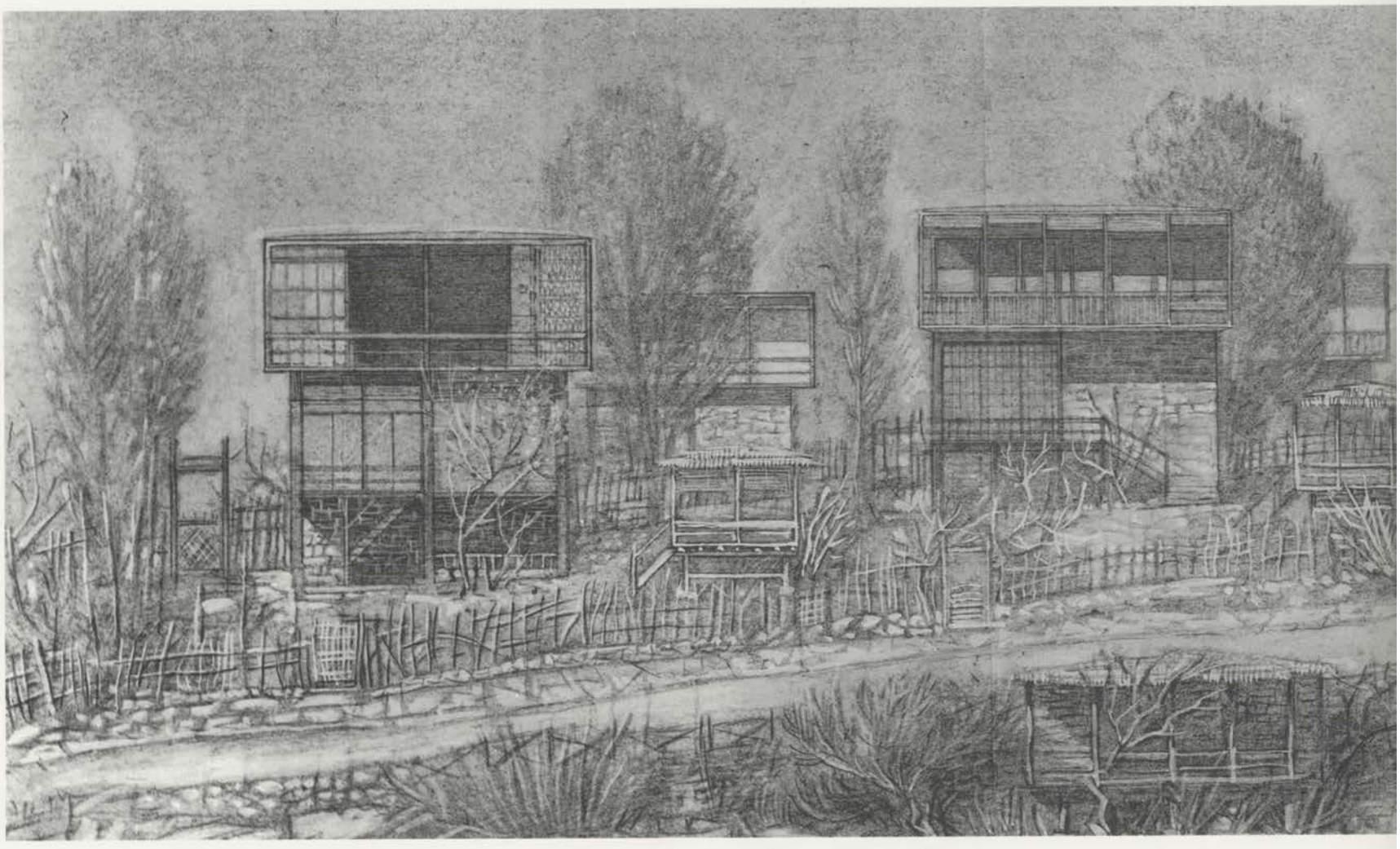
Pikionis liked working with complementary contrasts: open and closed, inside and outside, light and shade, solid and transparent, linear and concentric, unity and diversity, past and present... His work is multivalent; he endeavours to bring about a synthesis of these contrasts.

Emile Chlimintzas

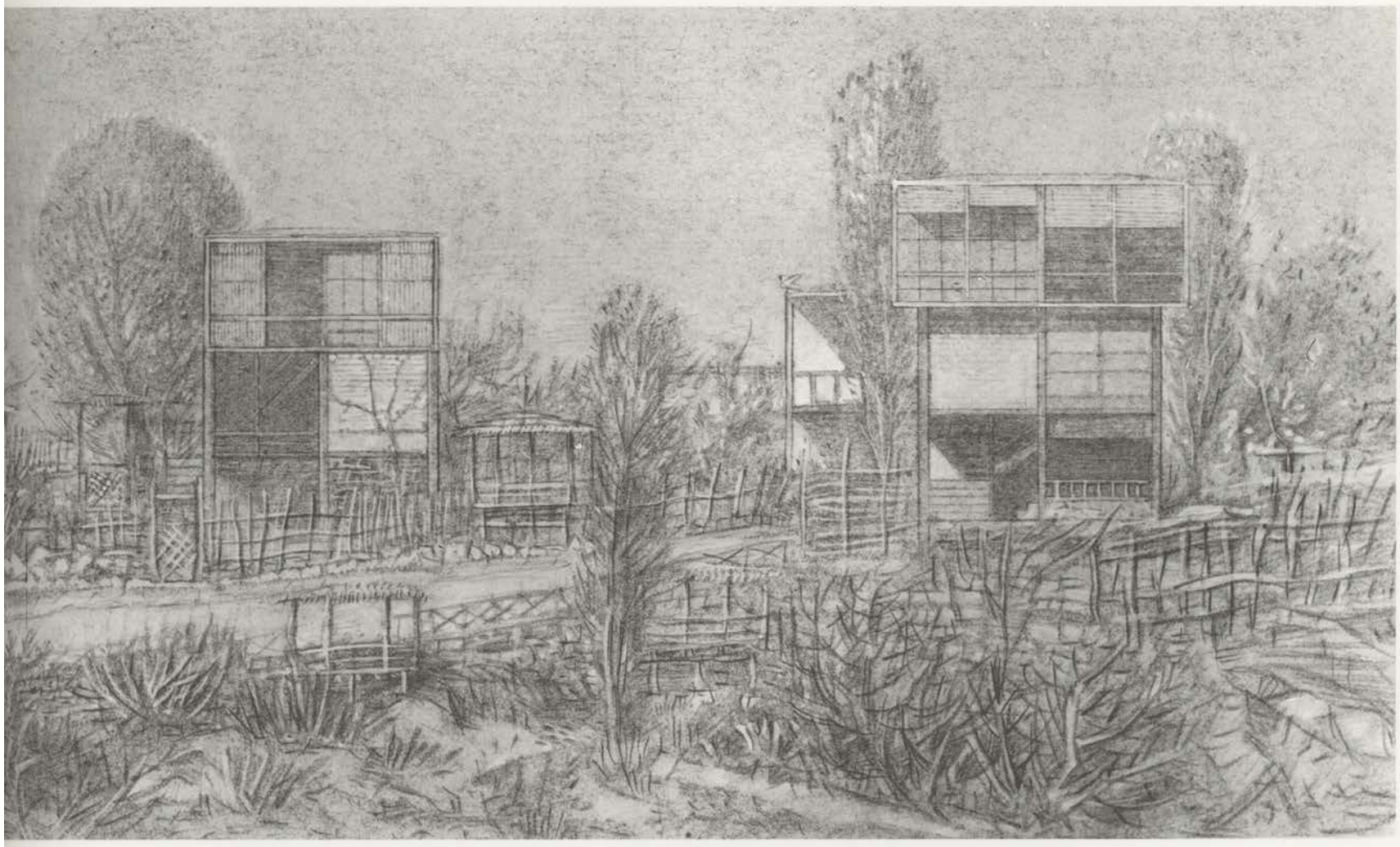


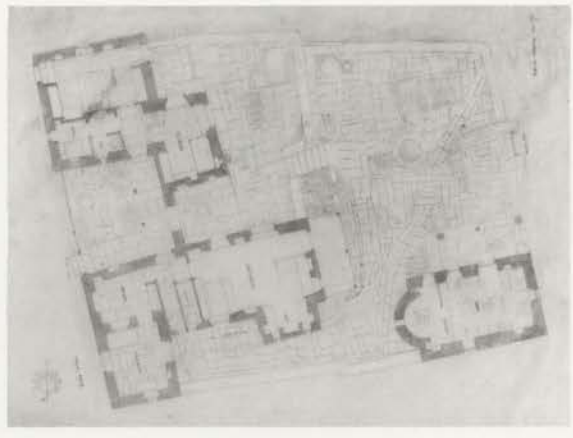
AIXONI PROTOTYPE HOUSING

ATHENS 1950–4
With *Alexander Papageorgiou*



The Aixoni project on the outskirts of Athens, designed in 1950-4 with his associate Papageorgiou, was Pikionis' first opportunity to organize a small residential community in its entirety. He proposed a range of dwelling types, as well as public sports facilities and a community centre. The project was perhaps inspired by the cultural estate in Delphi envisioned by the poet Anghelos Sikelianos and sketched by Pikionis himself. Alas, it was not to be.





Top:
preliminary sketch of an Aixoni house

Above:
street elevation

Far left:
cultural estate at Delphi

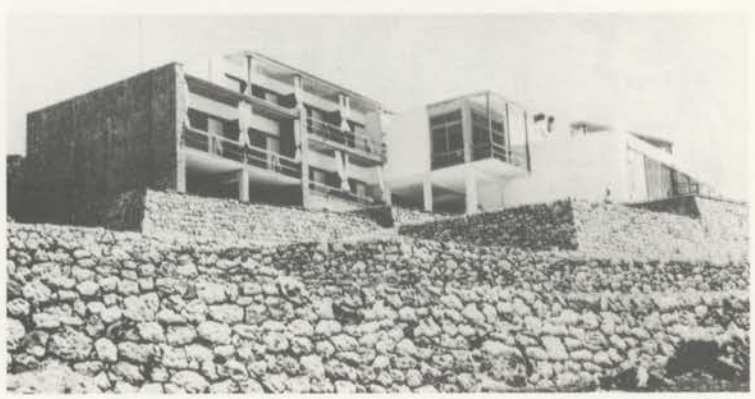
Left:
plan of church and rectory enclosure at Aixoni

XENIA HOTEL

DELPHI, 1951-4
With *Alexander Papageorgiou*

Below:
landscaping study

Bottom:
side elevation and view



DIMITRIS PIKIONIS

ALISON AND PETER SMITHSON

I have no perfect recall of the date of my first walk up the Pikionis path to the foot of the Acropolis in Athens. Certainly in 1951 there was a post-civil-war asphalt engineer's motor road with mostly taxis; rather empty; very disturbing; a flat place in a brilliant memory plate of a first visit to Greece.

The Pikionis path in its turn was almost equally disturbing; why scour the demolition sites of Neo-Classical Athens for old marble sinks and portable washstands and splash-backs to pave a pathway up to the Acropolis?

To find under one's foot an Ionic volute used as a stone amongst other re-used stones in a back street behind the walls of Istanbul is to feel history: to stand on a sink outlet put under the slopes of the Acropolis by an architect, for intentions unknown, is to feel unsettled; be given a part in a story meant to confuse time, not to consolidate it.

Peter Smithson, April 1989

'We need this exhibition to know more about the work-life of Pikionis to put to the test your instinct that Pikionis is one of the "Silent Architects".' With this statement I was invited by P.S. to state what I knew about Pikionis.

At a time when there was a lot of talk and very little word-matching action — the thin time of the fifties and sixties, when one even got blamed for thinking — Pikionis took what chances to build he was offered (maybe the Albertis receive few chances), in each case working carefully and in a very artisan way, using items of the Neo-Classical junkyard and arranging them — in a parallel phenomenon to Nigel Henderson's and Eduardo Paolozzi's interest in the 'as found' — to bridge between the battered old — rocks and buildings — and the motor-whirled, fume-laden, 'new' Athens.

As already stated, in the fifties the first Marshall Aid was spent on a short length of very black asphalt road to the Acropolis. There must have been a gap in our visits to Greece when the inevitable camera-holding Japanese documented (in full) the Pikionis path... In that same time it seemed the Japanese construction companies were sending architects on scholarships by the dozen to photograph anything of any architect ever noted and then publishing the photographs — sometimes in beautiful colour — in their house magazines. That anyone should document so seriously items of European demolition rubble laid as a path was hysterical, yet it was a relief that the asphalt road had been removed.

When I was in Athens in the early eighties the Pikionis path was already breaking up and the planting which held the ground between was being tracked through by bus-harried tourists... I suggested that those of the original Pikionis team remaining in Athens should reconvene and ask for funding to work over the ground... I even suspected that a relief track might have to be contrived... as far as I know, nothing has happened to 'hold' the path.

In September 1988, we sat with two of the Pikionis team members in the Xenia Hotel in Delphi. In the Xenia, Pikionis seems to have related modern requirements of cleanliness in a place-to-stay with what Delphi houses may have been like newly built when the village was moved off the sacred site by the French in 1892... certainly these sort of 'reflections' on ethnic 'folk' building are in no way related to the rubble houses, animal smells, chicken feathers everywhere, pergolas of worn-out wood painted blue and barely supporting old vines, above perilously sloping, oozing yards as in the typical Delphi house in which we stayed in 1951. We must assume that virtually nothing now exists in Greece from the fly-blown, flea-jumping Ottoman times (nor anything that a Turkish Governor may have lived in, remembering a more sophisticated Ottoman life, except the odd floor fountain in ethnographic museums). The Delphi Xenia is related to some commonly accepted dream-time ethnic and universal small urge to keep roots which all countries partake in (perhaps the Californian defensible Spanish 'station' reproductions of the last century were some of the earliest examples). Pikionis raises the compulsion a notch; occasionally — Tunisia, America — we stumble on spaces as eloquent (often more eloquent than the original even though designed by foreign tourist hotel architects); but Germany, Switzerland, Austria, have — for all their occasional 'dressing the part' — lost their ability completely, although 'in keeping' is in some places mandatory. It's all 'pub-built'... but maybe, like builders' housing, Bavarian geranium-fringed chalets are the true, current 'folk' build: that is perhaps its most frightening aspect, the total loss of all artisan sensibility.

So there is a great difference of intention, of capability, of thought at work through the hands in Pikionis' buildings — the chapel and café on Aeropagus — we simply do not know enough to gauge the lack of rhetoric in this 'Silent Architect': we respond to we know not what, apart from placement, and for the rest take him on trust by accepting the seriousness of his disciples.

Already the Delphi Xenia interior has been and continues to be slowly altered and may lose its easy fit by being so cased out of the simplest of materials and the elemental puttings-together of the time when it was built... but the effortless ease of positioning on its slope, its protected open and interstitial spaces, levels, descents... in my memory these cannot be spoilt.

Alison Smithson, April 1989

Ionic volute used as a cobblestone in a back street behind the land-side wall of Istanbul.

Overleaf: landscape drawing by Pikionis

A SENTIMENTAL TOPOGRAPHY

DIMITRIS PIKIONIS

As we walk upon this earth, our hearts experience anew that rapturous joy we felt as children when we first discovered our ability to move in space — the alternating disruption and restoration of balance which is walking.[1]

We rejoice in the progress of our body across the uneven surface of the earth and our spirit is gladdened by the endless interplay of the three dimensions that we encounter at every step, the shifting and changing that occurs with the mere passage of a cloud high up in the sky. We walk past a rock, or a tree trunk, or a shrub's tufted foliage; we move up and down, following the rise and fall of the ground, tracing its convexities, which are the hills and mountains, and its concavities, which are the valleys.

Then we rejoice in the wide, flat expanse of the plains; we measure the earth by the toil of our bodies.

This deserted country lane is far superior to the thoroughfares of the large modern city, for all its twists and curves and infinite changes of perspective show us the divine hypostasis of singularity when submitted to the harmony of the whole.

We meditate upon the spirit which emanates from each particular land or place.[2]

Here the ground is hard, stony, precipitous, and the soil is brittle and dry. There the ground is level; water surges out of mossy patches. Further on, the breeze, the altitude and the configuration of the ground announce the proximity of the sea. Further on still, the vegetation runs riot, in an extreme culmination of the earth's thrust towards form, towards a perfect attunement of its clothing to the rhythm of the seasons.

Natural forces, geometry of the earth and quality of light and air single out this land as a cradle of civilization. Mysterious exhalations seem to rise from the ground. Here are ancient, venerable places of worship — a precipice that fills one's soul with awe, a cave where mysterious spirits, supernatural powers dwell. In face of these primeval images of the earth, the soul is shot through with a mystical tremor, like the water-finder when his divining-rod comes upon the invisible presence of a subterranean stream.

Light created the world. Light preserves it and makes it fruitful.

Light reveals the world to our corporeal eyes so that the light of our spirits might in turn illuminate the world.

Above the fixed, motionless[3] geometry of the earth stretches the perpetually moving domain of air and light.[4]

The Star of Life rotates, comes and goes, and so produces day and night, giving us heat and cold, showers and drought, clear and dark skies, cloud, rain and wind. The human soul rejoices in this mobile geometry of air and light which constitutes the seasons.

Light — the infinite world of form and colour — delights the soul. The soul meditates upon the hours, upon the angle of the sun's rays, the length of shadows, the disposition of rain and drought, hot and cold,[5] the configuration of the clouds. But on this particular day what pleases me most is to concentrate on the spectacle of the ground bathed in calm, wintry light.

Here are stone formations shaped by divine forces — rocks, broken boulders, the dust born of the fruitful soil, its particles as uncountable as the stars.

I stoop and pick up a stone. I caress it with my eyes, with my fingers. It is a piece of grey limestone. Fire moulded its divine shape, water sculpted it and endowed it with this fine covering of clay that has alternating patches of white and rust, with a yellow tinge. I turn it around in my hands. I study the harmony of its contours. I delight in the way hollows and protrusions, light and shadows, balance each other on its surface. I rejoice in the way the universal laws are embodied and fulfilled in this stone — the laws which, according to Goethe, would have remained unknown to us had not an innate sense of beauty revealed them to the poet and the artist.

In truth, it occurs to me, O stone, that as the incandescent mass of this planet was torn away from the sun and set spinning around like a ring of fire, eventually condensing into our earth, you came to occupy a place within its vast expanse that was in no way accidental. The harmony of the whole, which determined the inclination of our planet's axis, also assigned this particular place to you as your home, as the generator of your supremely spiritual form, within an atmosphere and light that are spiritually attuned to you.[6]

The dance of your atoms, governed by number, shapes your constituent parts according to the law of your singularity. You thus enact this twofold law of universal and individual harmony.

I feel you growing, expanding in my imagination.

Your lateral surfaces turn into slopes, ridges, noble precipices. Your hollows become caverns, where water silently trickles from the cracks in the rose-coloured rock.

Stone, you compose the lineaments of this landscape. You *are* the landscape. You are the Temple that is to crown the precipitous rocks of your own Acropolis. For what else does the Temple do but enact the same twofold law which you serve?

More than anything else, is not the Temple also 'an explanation of the way in which the entirety of things is arranged'?[7] Is its equilibrium not similar to that of the mountains of vegetation, of all living creatures?

All the forces of nature converge and work together to produce this particular configuration: the refined air, the bright light, the colour of the sky, the floating clouds, the slope of the mountains, the boulders scattered around the Temple's stylobate and the grass growing up between the cracks.

O earth, you reduce everything to yourself as the measure, the *modulus* which penetrates all things.

You gave shape to the city, and to the city's various forms of government. You gave shape to the sounds that make up language. You foreshadowed the arts that involve words and forms.

Is it not this concordance, this rule of the same laws in both nature and art, that allows us to see forms of nature transformed before our very eyes into forms of art, or vice versa — or one art form transformed into a different art form? Is it not this concordance, this uniformity governing the apparently most diverse creations, which has the power to reveal and explain them by reflection, by comparison?

As I paced upon this soil, as I journeyed across this kingdom of limestone and clay, I saw the limestone change into a lintel, and the red clay colour the walls of an imaginary shrine. The large round pebbles of the Cladeus river appeared to me as the heads of heroes, and the statues on the pediments as mountains. Zeus' long hair became a sheer precipice, and this mountain of a thousand shapes — which I gradually pieced together as I walked across it, recomposing in my mind the harmony of its countours — took on the form of a Greek statue.

The pleats and folds in the costume of this peasant woman undulate around her ankles, tracing mountain shapes upon the ground. The woven ornamentation around the hem of her skirt stands out as vividly as a frieze. The dance unfolds like a moving colonnade. The sound of the pipe, interwoven with the dancers' song, makes the mountain tops sway and the rivers flow. The rhythm of these draperies as they ripple around the body, the shape of this brow or forearm, the waves and curls of that hair — all of these explain the landscape.

O limestone, you fashioned the stern brow of Aeschylus. Musical notes emanate from the stylobate and the moulded echinus evokes an ancient manuscript. The austere structure that can be seen in the statues can also be found in language.

Yet what are the secret relations, O almighty number, that you have established today between the geometry of creation and the crystalline air which allows the unadulterated essence of divine light to filter through to us?

No other light, no other day can ever equal the clarity of the calm, limpid autumn hours.

An ineffable mystery irradiates creation this day.

Why do the tuft-like clouds draw apart high up in the blue sky or float as gentle, transparent veils across the mountain tops? What

have the innumerable blades of grass to tell as they break through the dark, moist soil — are they voices from the past, or spirits rising from the kingdom of Hades? And what about these rough boulders — white, grey-blue, pink — or the shards of pottery scattered over the grass?[8] The voices of children at play and the crowing of a rooster echo mysteriously through the fine, rarefied air. Dried-up wells gape like the dark, open mouths of tragic masks, adding depth to the landscape. The skin expands under the warmth of the sun, and then contracts under the cold touch of shade. The autumn breeze plays sweetly with the blades of grass and the asphodels, both of them nourished by the earth's bitter green sap.[9]

A profound mystery connects this hour and the light that pervades it with the golden hide of the wild beast, to the convoluted horns and thick fleece of these grazing, ambling sheep, yellow like the colour of time-worn marble, or black like the shadow of that dark rock.

Through the agency of this particular hour the mystery of time becomes one with the mystery of space. What irreconcilable elements have merged together here? Wherever one turns, one may see the double-headed hermae of antithesis.

Faced with a mystery of this magnitude, the soul no longer needs an explanation, for in the deepening of nature's mystery, the soul undergoes a process, an experience, a 'passion' in the depths of which lies understanding.

It is in moments like this, O Doric column, that your mystery is revealed to me. Now I understand: the 'tension' that governs your lines is not meant only to serve the laws of statics, extending natural beauty into a form of art;[10] the grooves of your fluted body are not meant only to distribute light equally across your surface, inserting shade into light and light into shade, so that the tones of your stone shaft blend with the tones of the sky above and the rock below. You are, it seems to me, an animate being thirsting for union as you revolve upon your own axis, your grooves like eyes that strive to retain, within their revolving motion, what has come to pass and to contemplate, full of trepidation, what is about to happen — but this is not all. More than any of these things, this hour reveals that this longed-for union would project and condense the culmination of nature's dramatic mystery within an art form corresponding to nature itself.

There is an undecipherable connection between these stories, this bitter grass, these green shadows, these voices that streak the air, the southern breezes, the torn plumes of the clouds, all this dramatic mystery which appears to be composed of irreconcilable opposites; all these are made one in the equation of your grooves.

Is not your own form made of irreconcilable opposites held together in perfect balance? And the coldness of the marble, the austerity of your vertical shaft, your parallel lines — have they not merged with the warmth of the sun, with the unsurpassable sensitivity of the spirit, to make you what you are?

It was surely in an hour such as this that the artist's mind conceived you. And each time that number establishes the ineffable harmony between that hour and your form, your mystery is reborn.

This is what I thought, on an early April day, when I perceived you behind the golden dust rising from the chariot wheels in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. Or was it on some summer evening, as darkness was spreading across the mountains in the west, enveloping the land, while in the east the sky was streaked with pink?

But in this wintry hour I think of you again, O Doric cyma, of the stern music of your form poised high up on the Acropolis, high above the sheer rocks and the clay soil of the olive grove. I reflect upon the winter light falling on your harmonious incurvatures, upon the cool shadows that nestle among them and constitute your darkness.

There is something awesome about the austerity, the sharpness, the sensitivity of your shape, rising out of a perfect mathematical formulation.[11]

I can visualize the men who wrought you. I can see the robes draped around their beautiful limbs. They have stern brows, furrowed by deep thought. There is a sternness too about their eyes, their temples, their beards.

But how is one to bring to mind all the hours of the year, or even of a single day? The spirits that inhabit morning and afternoon, noon and evening? The days of summer and spring, the halcyon days of winter and autumn? The days when the wind blows from the north or the south, the days of Apeliotes, the east wind, and of the summer winds that blow for forty days after the rising of the dog-star? For these are the spirits that will enable us to witness the 'suffering' and the transformation of form and space within the element of time.

This journal is by no means complete but does it really matter? Is it not enough if the perusal of what there is helps to make manifest the principle which I believe nature wishes to teach us: nothing exists on its own; everything is part of a total harmony. All things are interconnected; for they are all affected and changed by each other. We can apprehend one thing only through the intermediary of everything else.

Notes

1. In an attempt to analyse the human act of walking, Rodin remarked admiringly: 'Man is a walking cathedral' *(Les cathédrales de France)*.
2. The geometry of a place or land is a product of its composition. By composition I mean the nature of the materials that go into its making, and also the nature of the diverse forces that have worked or are still working upon it. The nature of matter has to do with chemistry, which is ruled, like all things, by number. But the operation of external forces (such as fire, water or earthquakes), though it may appear wanton and uncontolled to human eyes, is really as strictly calculated by nature as the proliferation of the minutest living creatures in the universe.
3. 'Motionless' in a relative sense only, since this geometry is also affected and influenced, through a reflex process, by the motion of the light and air encompassing it.
4. Climate, in other words the mobile geometry of a country's atmosphere, derives from its relative position on this planet. A country's position determines its distance from the sun, which changes with the seasons. Climate is thus affected and influenced by this other geometry. The intensity and quality of light is determined by a country's position in relation to the sun, by the angle of the sun's rays and by the quality of the atmosphere. A sentient, empathic nature often ascribes the quality of atmosphere to light itself.
5. Our sentient nature cannot conceive of 'matter' independently of temperature, or the constitution of the atmosphere independently of the intensity and quality of light. A space is perceived to be smaller when it is hot and larger when it is cold. The weight of matter appears to increase with heat. Shape becomes sharper with cold.
6. The profound sense of wonder aroused by the sight of the perfect accord between the air and light of a land and the geometry of its soil compels us to accept the existence of a harmonious unity linking all three elements. How else could one explain the incomparable harmony between the pure, spiritual, perfectly modelled shape of the mountains of Attica, and the fine, mellow air and brilliant light in which they stand?

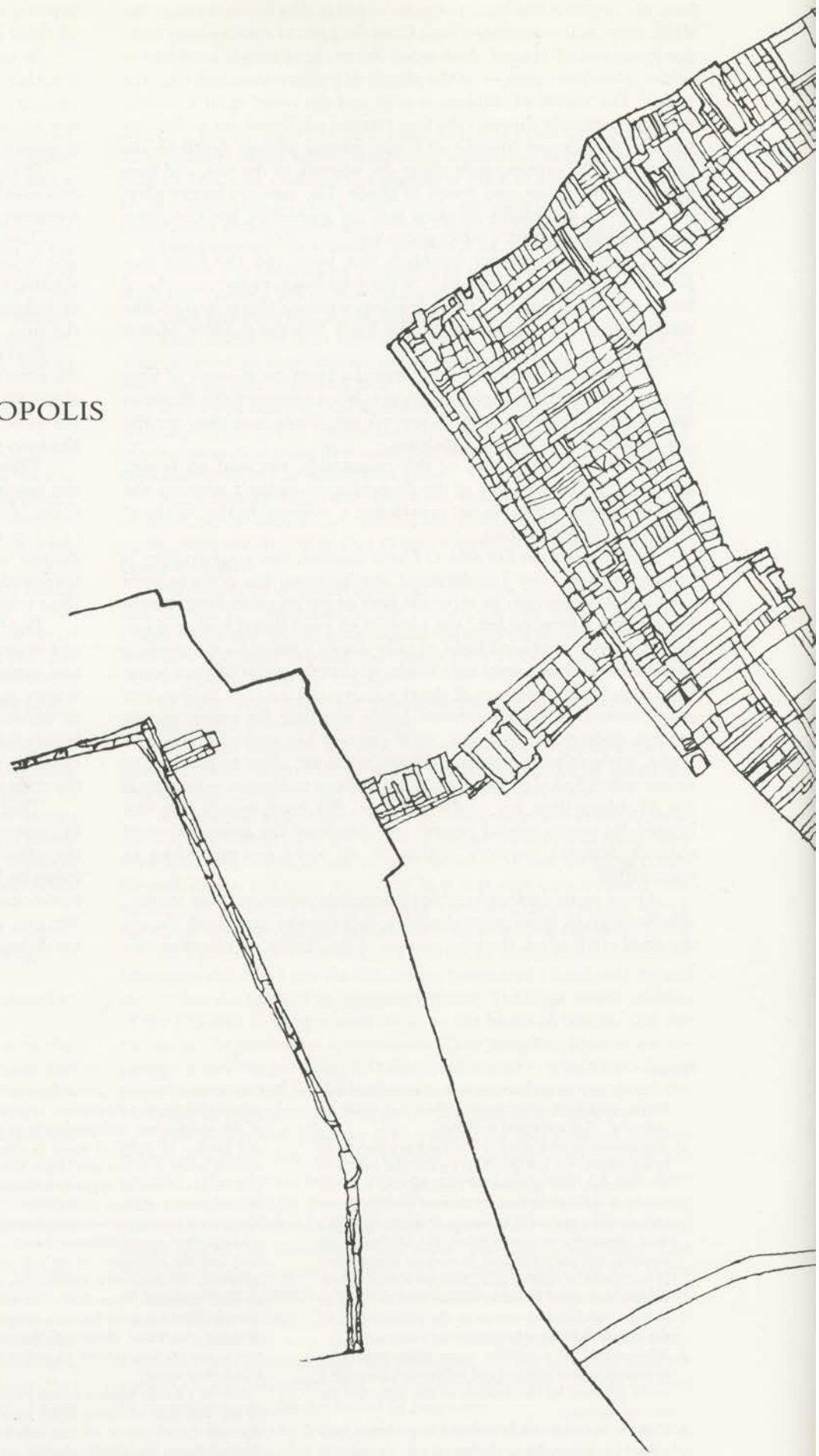
   Indeed, I do not think it would be presumptuous to say that this harmony is no accident but the rigorous consequence of the inherent harmony which informs the whole principle of creation: on the contrary, it would be fully in accord with our innate sense of cosmic harmony. We may therefore accept as an axiomatic truth that the geometry of the ground and the air and light of a country are entirely consonant elements.
7. To recall the words of Heraclitus: 'Yet although the logos is common to all, most men live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own', prompting Sextus Empiricus' comment: 'And this is nothing else than an explanation of the way in which the entirety of things is arranged. Therefore, insofar as we share in the memory of this we say what is true, but when we depend on private experience we say what is false.' (English translation by Philip Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, New York, 1964.)
8. An inexplicable pattern of kinship and contrast links the green vegetation and the red soil with the two colours that adorn ancient Greek vases; black and red.
9. At moments like this, form and motion take on a strange stillness, becoming static. The vertical line, the horizontal, the oblique, the point — all seem to become invested with a deepening harmony.
10. The sensitivity of nature penetrates into the work of art through the sensitivity of the spirit. What appears to be the rectilinear geometry of architecture is in reality the geometry of curves. The theoretical definition of the tensions and equations in these curves, and their translation into matter, can only be achieved by the finest artistic sensibility.
11. The austerity of the Greek column is of a different nature to the theocratic austerity of the Egyptian column. In the latter, it amounts to a subjection to divine attributes, whereas in the Greek column, it emerges as the product of a spirit that is austere, but also human and free.

LANDSCAPING THE ATHENS ACROPOLIS

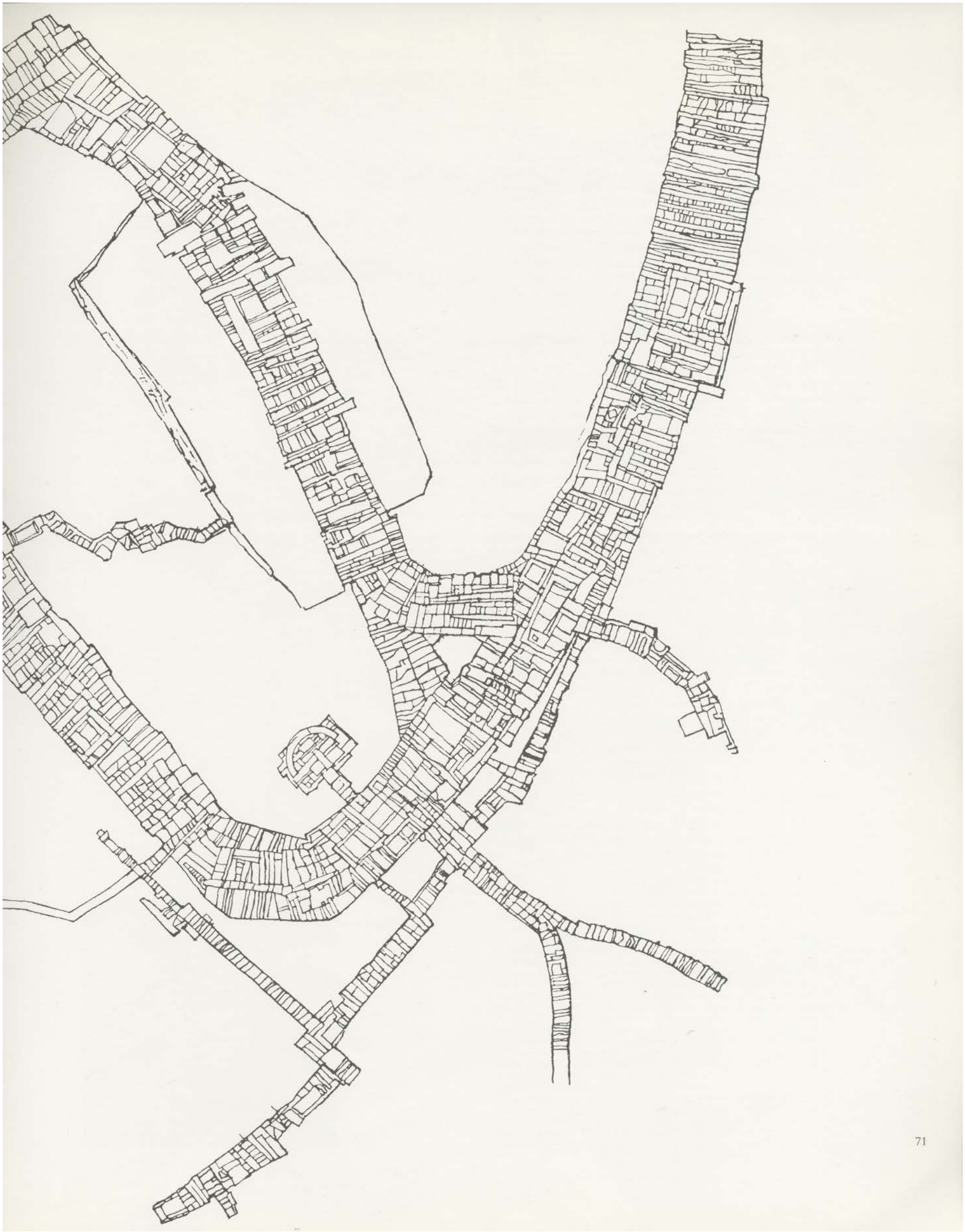
A Photographic Essay by *HÉLÈNE BINET*

With texts by

AGNIS PIKIONIS 72
DIMITRIS ANTONAKAKIS 90
THALIS ARGYROPOLOUS 93



Road and footpath study for the landscaping of the area immediately below the Acropolis (see page 52 for Philapappou landscaping)



AGNIS PIKIONIS

In 1951, it was decided to give some order to the archaeological site surrounding the Acropolis of Athens as part of a general improvement plan for the city centre. At that time, most of the area had fallen into total neglect. Past attempts at 'improvement' were in such complete disaccord with the landscape that they proved to be much more of an eyesore than the site's original abandoned state. Finally, it was considered imperative to refashion the sacred site in the manner it deserved. The project was entrusted to Dimitris Pikionis, then near retirement as Professor of Architecture at the Athens Polytechnic.

Pikionis' emotional involvement with the Attic landscape had become apparent at an early age. As a schoolboy, he explored the countryside around Athens on long, solitary walks, and soon began to paint it with an almost religious fervour. It was in his worship of nature that Pikionis discovered the precepts that were to shape his intensely personal approach to art and architecture.

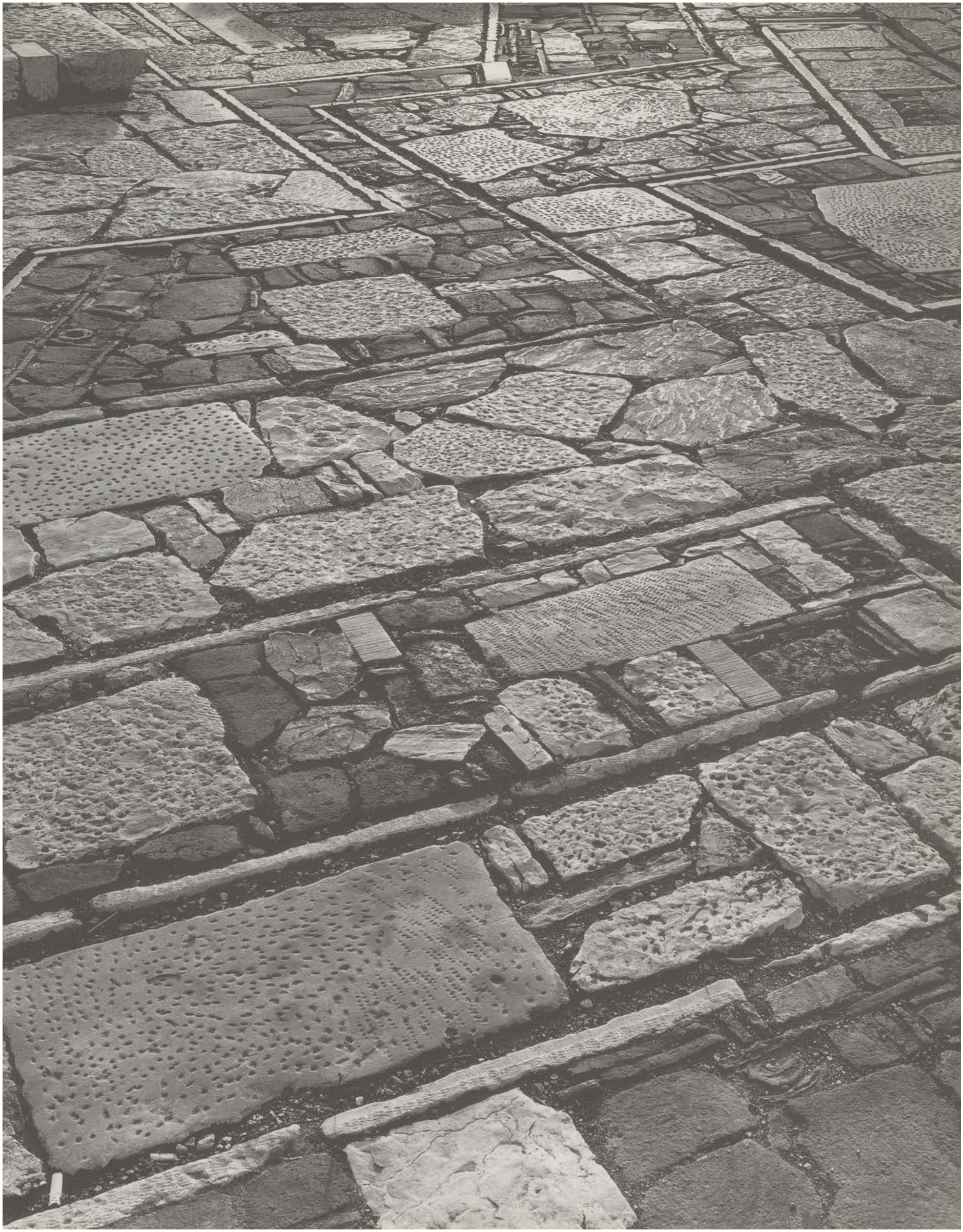
In 1935, in an essay entitled 'A Sentimental Topography', he sought to express his relationship with nature and to show how a country or a place reveals its innermost character, its essence, through its natural configuration. During this period, he produced a series of drawings inspired by the mythical cosmogony of Attica and the pediments of ancient temples. Pikionis believed that nature was invested with a deep metaphysical significance — a religious spirit which prompted him throughout his life to passionately defend the Athenian landscape against indiscriminate intervention and damage.

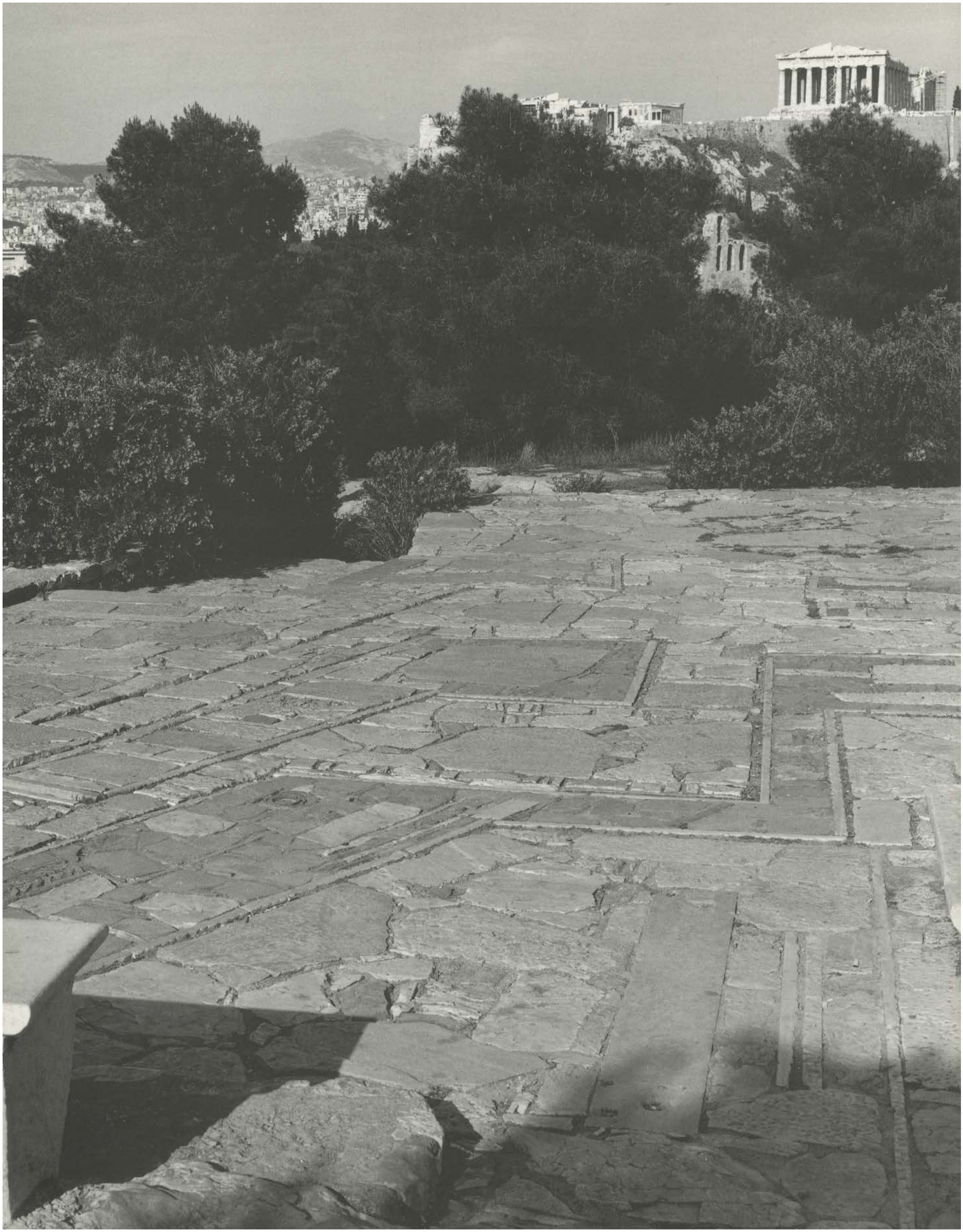
Pikionis was assigned the task of replanning and landscaping the entire area surrounding the Acropolis, the Hill of the Muses (otherwise known as Philopappou Hill) and the Hill of the Nymphs (Observatory Hill). The project included the design of a pavilion next to the small church of St Dimitris Loumbardiaris, as well as improvements to the priest's house and church itself. There were also provisions for the eventual linking of the Acropolis site with the Roman Agora and the Kerameikos.

Pikionis' first step was to clear the area of all the existing installations that offended its historical and aesthetic character: the first thing to go was the ugly asphalt road leading from the Odeon of Herodes Atticus to the Propylaea. In the years that followed, Pikionis devoted himself wholeheartedly to the Acropolis project. It occupied him to the exclusion of everything else. For months on end, he would go to the site early every morning and work on the paving of the roads with his workmen and assistants, staying all day in the blazing sun and returning home only at sunset.

Progress was slow, far behind schedule, which meant that Pikionis had to put up with constant pressure from Government officials who were unable to understand his way of working. In 1955, he wrote to Constantine Karamanlis, then Minister of Public Works, outlining the frustration and antagonism he had to face on the project. The following extracts vividly convey what he felt.

> **As you well know, formulating a correct theoretical view is no guarantee of it being put into practice correctly. You are surely aware that the important thing is not only *what* is to be done, but *how* it is to be done. In other words, the quality of the finished work cannot be determined, described or formulated *a priori*, whether in writing or *viva voce*. The actual result may cover an infinite qualitative range: it may turn out to be a totally inferior or simply mediocre work, or achieve the highest possible standard — a form that is unique. You must also know that artistic resources in this country are scarce: whereas in the past our long and unbroken artistic tradition was conducive to the creation of beautiful and genuine artifacts, our own age sadly lacks such favourable conditions. Thus it is only through unceasing effort and a thorough knowledge of the project that anything worthwhile can be achieved. The conditions prevailing in our country should not be ignored; we must exercise the greatest caution in carrying out a project which is in reality artistic rather than merely mechanical. Under conditions such as I have described, a theoretically sound concept may easily lend itself to misinterpretation or degenerate into something commonplace or mediocre, so depriving the undertaking of its true meaning — conforming, in other words, to the letter but not to the spirit of the law.**
>
> **We are dealing with an extensive and, by its very nature, complex project. It comprises a certain amount of town planning**





— streets, alleys, road junctions, car parks — as well as the paving of roads and pathways, the construction of retaining walls, parapets, stone enclosures, way-stations and pavilions, and a great deal of landscaping, planting of trees, shrubs, etc. It goes without saying that all these elements must be merged, right down to the minutest detail, into one concept. Poor workmanship in any of the separate aspects of the project would result in an aesthetic discordance which would jeopardize the quality of the work as a whole.

As for the architect who bears the overall responsibility for completing the project, he has to be able to rise above the conventional, ephemeral attitudes typical of our age. His historical sense of form will not tolerate the use of the banalities of present-day fashion on the site. In order to meet the demands of this project, he will also have to give up practically all other engagements and be in constant contact with the work in progress — in short, he will have to give himself up to it without reserve.

...What is commonly designated as architectural supervision is a totally inadequate term for this project, which necessitates the extensive exercise on the site itself of free initiative of a kind that cannot be foreseen in any blueprint or described in any contract. Plans and instructions are insufficient here, for the plan is not applicable as it stands, but serves only as a model representing a general idea which requires constant interpretation. As for instructions, the architect himself will have to interpret them, with the help of his assistants; indeed, I would say that he will have to *build* the work himself through the hands of his craftsmen and masons. Only by this practical, supremely active type of supervision can a sensitive, living architecture be produced rather than a lifeless, unimaginative one. This is true of any worthwhile architectural work, but all the more so in the present case.

These are not subjective views, but objective, factual observations which always have been, and will continue to be, valid at any time and place where a true spiritual culture exists. They are certainly not meant to unduly delay the project's completion. Slackness is as unwarranted here as senseless haste. What should be kept in mind is the ancient Greek motto 'Make haste slowly'. Together with all the other necessary conditions, this injunction will ensure Sir, that the result will be what you have shown to be your express wish: a project with a form commensurate with the historical mandate arising from its very nature.

The following extract from Pikionis' introductory report on the project gives us a clear idea of how he visualized the landscaping of the site and explains the building methods he proposed to follow:

The architect will have to devise new methods to deal with every aspect of the work, down to the last detail; he will have to revise all building methods currently in use and invest them with the validity of practices inspired by ancient art.

Hence the construction of the way-stations, pavilions, etc. will require stones of a special texture, shape and colour, as well as large loose boulders and marble lintels from ancient or Neo-Classical buildings. Reliefs and capitals will be ensconced in the walls. The alleyways and pathways will be ornamented with antique fragments, such as stone benches and cylindrical shapes belonging to tombs from the period of Dimitris Poliorcetes, which can be found in abundance in the courtyard of the National Archaeological Museum. Several other antique fragments discovered *in situ* will also be used for this purpose.

For the wooden constructions, great care in the selection of timber will be required; the timber will be used either in its unprocessed state, providing this is in keeping with the spirit of the project, or in a processed form, providing an aesthetically valid solution is found — the ordinary way will not suffice.

As regards the landscaping of the site, the existing number of shrubs will have to be increased and a large amount of olive trees, both wild and cultivated, will have to be planted. The ancient monuments call for the kind of plants that customarily adorned sanctuaries in antiquity: pomegranate, laurel, myrtle.

The visual, chromatic, formal and symbolic aspects of the trees and plants on the site, as well as the overall composition, will have to be studied with particular care. This aspect of the project is closely related to the works on Vassilissis Sofias Avenue and at the Theseum, as there, too, the replanting has to be harmoniously integrated with its surroundings from both an aesthetic and a symbolic point of view. Non-indigenous trees will have to be removed, as will trees that clash with the general character of the site. Certain other types will have to be reduced in number (such as the cypresses, as their vertical lines lessen the impact of the ancient columns). Naturally the removal of unnecessary or unsuitable trees will be done gradually, to allow the new trees and plants enough time to replace them.

All these details have been mentioned here to emphasize the complexity of the project and to indicate why it is necessary to find the right solutions on site, whenever the existing plans, instructions and guidelines prove to be of no practical assistance.

In brief, I will only repeat that the need for *quality*, for higher aesthetic standards, arises from the very nature of the project, and from the major historical importance of the site.

The project was finally completed in 1957, after years of hard work. It was met with enthusiasm from architects, archaeologists and artists, as well as from ordinary people with a feeling for beauty — the improvements and additions to the site appeared to have always

been there, as a timeless integral part of the landscape, accessible to all people, as Pikionis intended.

Later, Professor Y. Despotopoulos wrote from Munich.

> **...On Good Friday I happened to follow a religious procession to the small church on the hill... I was therefore able to see how your work has turned the entire area into a single, well-balanced space of exceptionally high quality, bringing all the area's scattered monuments and ruins into the lives of ordinary men and women. I watched these people behaving in a reverent, otherworldly manner while attending the simple, homely ceremonies in the precincts of the church or wandering around on their Sunday outing. Until then I had never been able to discern any trace of moral elevation in the architectural works of this day and age — even though architecture can have no loftier purpose than to create an environment which ennobles the spirit. I assure you that I have noted and pondered upon this phenomenon many times on feast-days, at night or on Sunday morning walks.**
>
> **I urged several distinguished foreign friends of mine to visit the site, and they, too, 'behaved reverently' the moment they entered this area where you have unified 2,500 years of history.**

Pikionis answered this letter in the following way.

> **Thanks, a great many thanks for your letter, dear friend. I only hope I am worthy of it, and that your praise will turn out to be what the ancient Greeks desired: 'neither more nor less than what is due'. But then you are not foolhardy enough to venture into aesthetic analysis, which more often than not proves uncertain, or worse, barren. Instead, your instinct proved the most trustworthy guide; it enabled you to read into the souls of simple people and appreciate their unerring judgement. This is precisely how I proceeded while I was working on the project — how else could I have possibly found the courage to continue?**

Lewis Mumford wrote about the project in *The City in History.*

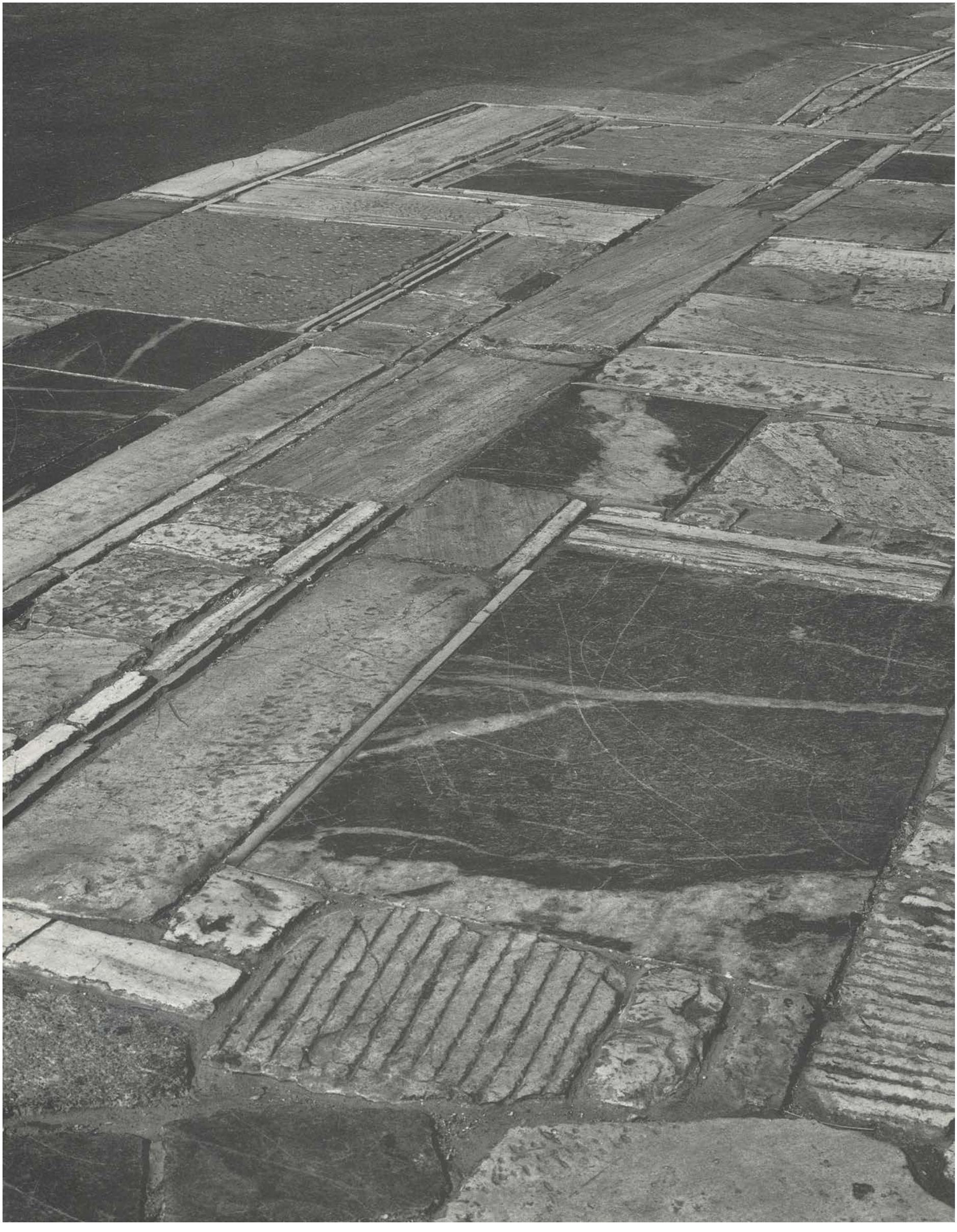
> **As for the open pavilion (of St Dimitris Loumbardiaris) with its garden and its nearby stone church on the road that leads up the Pnyx, it has a sixth-century BC touch, simple and 'primitive' but finely proportioned, that reveals a contemporary mind deeply steeped in the ancient culture, but free from any temptation to imitate the inimitable. This group mingles the sacred and the secular, as in the ancient Agora...**

Kurokawa wrote about Pikionis' roads in the *Kenchiku Bunka* review:

> **I was stepping on something solid, walking against a current of sightseers moving towards the Acropolis of Athens. I was walking in the direction of Philopappou Hill, sensing with my whole body something unusual. The Acropolis, as I had anticipated, made no impression upon me, but the Byzantine churches of Athens and this road by Pikionis did have something to say to me. ...Near the entrance to the Acropolis the road forms a symbolic open space, embracing a ruin of Doric and Ionic columns. Further down one comes across a parking lot, where the road has expanded like a calm pool of water in a stream. Still lower down, the stone-paved road forms a promenade which ceases abruptly when it meets a broad asphalt-paved automobile highway. Pedestrians cross to the other side by stepping on stone islands, like a passage over a brook.**
>
> **The ascent to the Philopappou starts here — the road is bordered on both sides by steps, though the central part remains a slope. Here and there marble benches are placed, making alcoves beside the steps and sometimes forming small enclaves. Rainwater flows down in concrete ditches or is caught in marble troughs before continuing its downward passage. The pattern of the pavement shows great variety, in some places designed as if to dam up the stream of cars, in others as if to wash it away.**
>
> **Where natural rocks occur beside the road, the concrete pathway stretches out to engulf them, and a small church halfway up the ascent to the Philopappou is assimilated by the road, embraced by its pattern of stone pavement. If this road can be called an 'architecture for human movement' the little church should be called an 'architecture of the road'.**
>
> **At the top of the ascent Pikionis' road comes to an end. When I looked back I saw a crowd of people unconsciously enjoying walking up the opposite slope to the Acropolis. The Parthenon was displaying its usual cold shape and I thought that while the Parthenon may express the dead form of ancient Greece, Pikionis' road expresses the living space of present-day Greece.**

In his writings and his architecture, Pikionis showed us the indestructible beauty that lies in the well-balanced alliance of nature with architecture. But he believed that this alliance could only succeed when the architect is moved by a deep respect for nature and man. Pikionis' spirituality arose from his quasi-religious faith in human values, in freedom, simplicity and purity. These words recur in his writings, revealing the root of his entire philosophy:

> **A little more humanity, a deeper understanding, a finer sensibility is enough to change all — from the initial stance down to the smallest detail.**

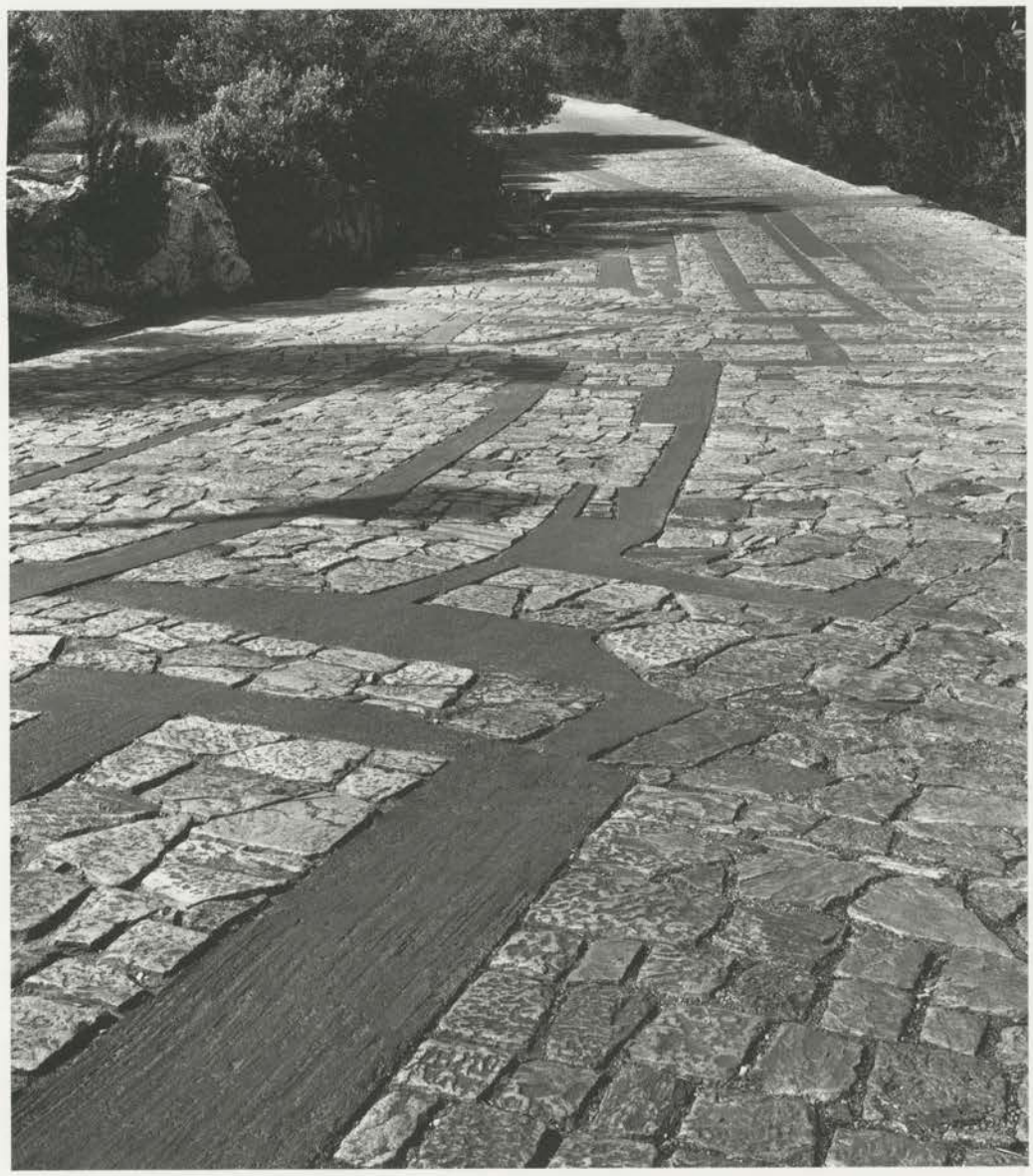


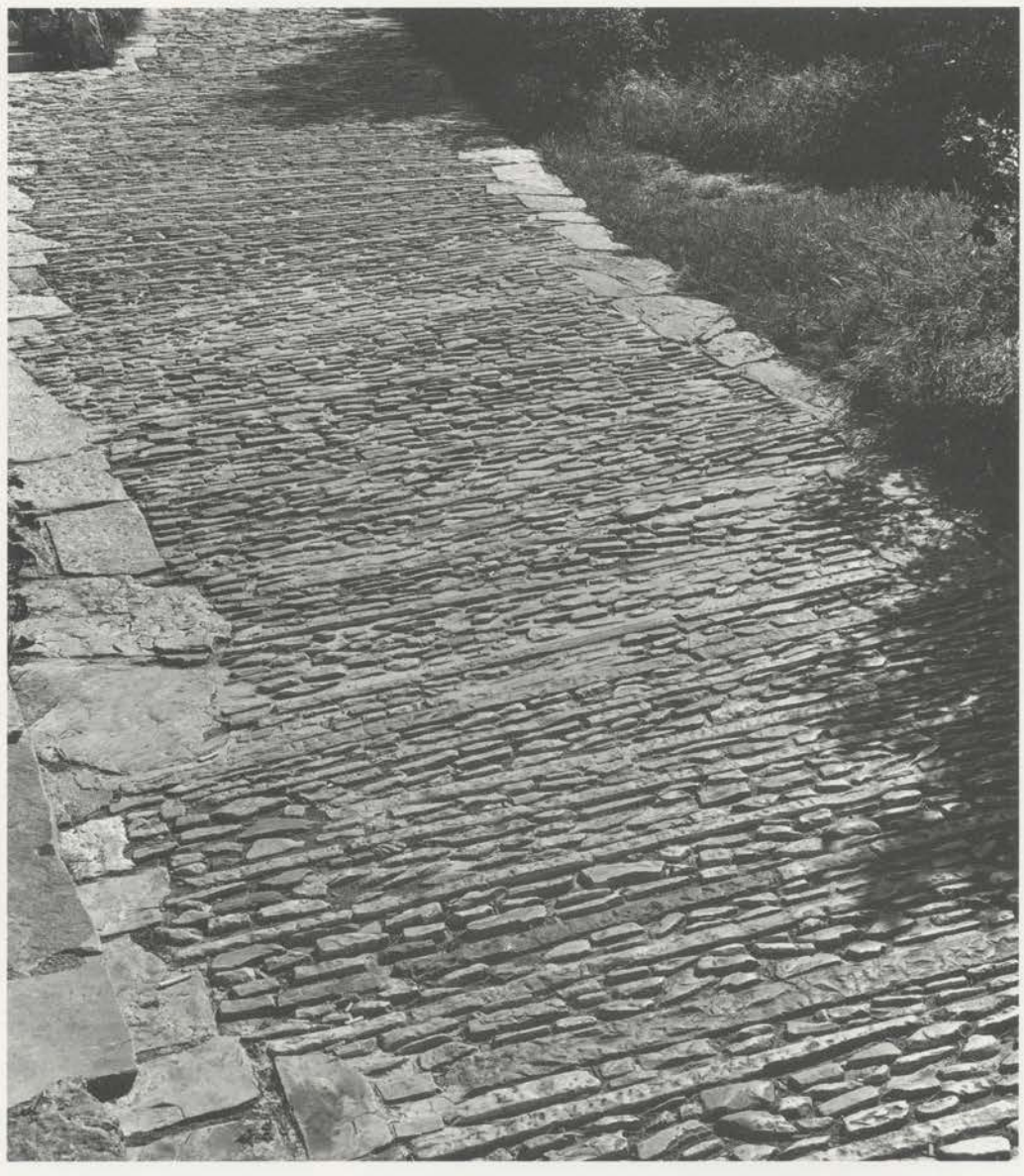
Infinity is not a focused collection of distant points, but exists somewhere outside of a series of concentric spheres, varying in atmosphere and content, their boundaries never very well defined, their range to be taken in at one's own speed, according to one's own inclination.

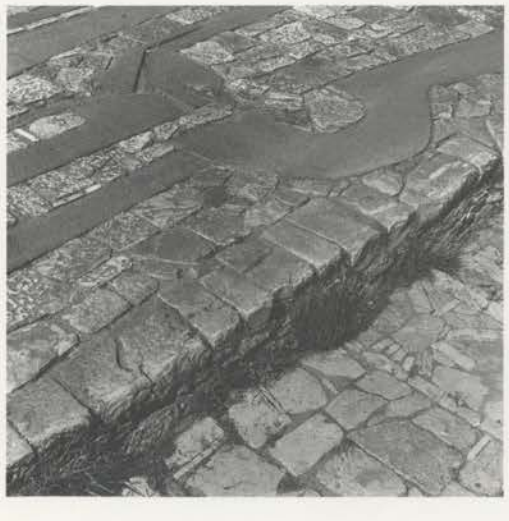
William Alex

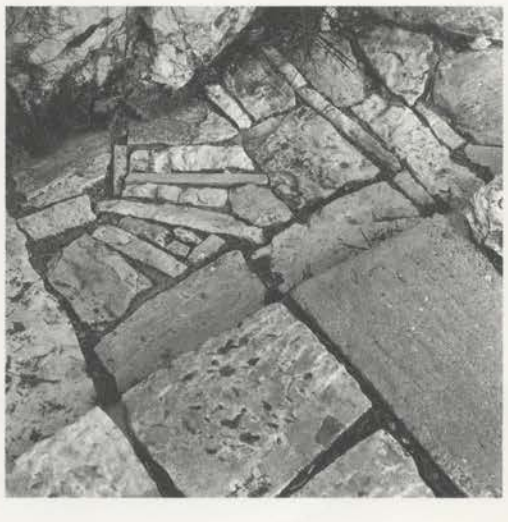
Pikionis located the seating areas where there was an opening in the foliage to catch the sun's rays as well as a view of the Acropolis. The belvedere on Philopappou Hill ensures an angle of vision towards the Parthenon of approximately thirty degrees. A secondary path leading to the belvedere reveals the ancient wall or 'Diatichisma' hidden amongst the dense growth of trees.

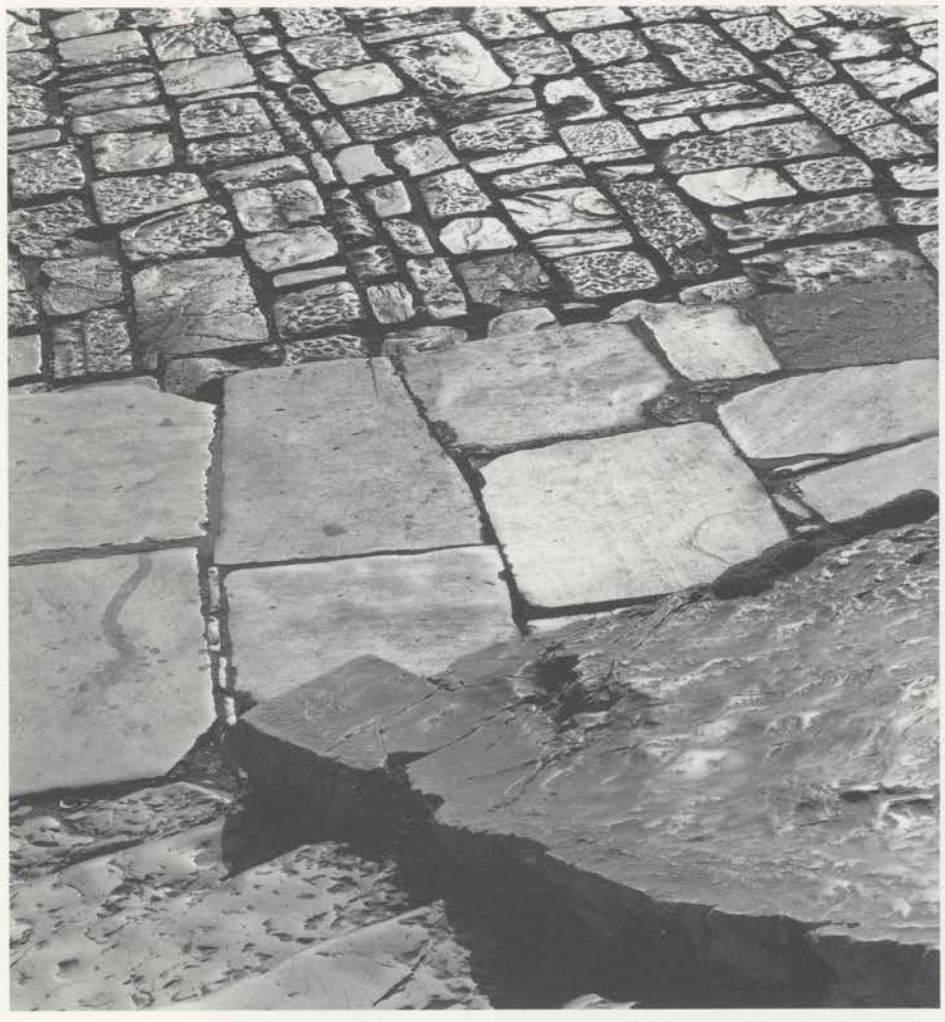
Alexandra Papageorgiou









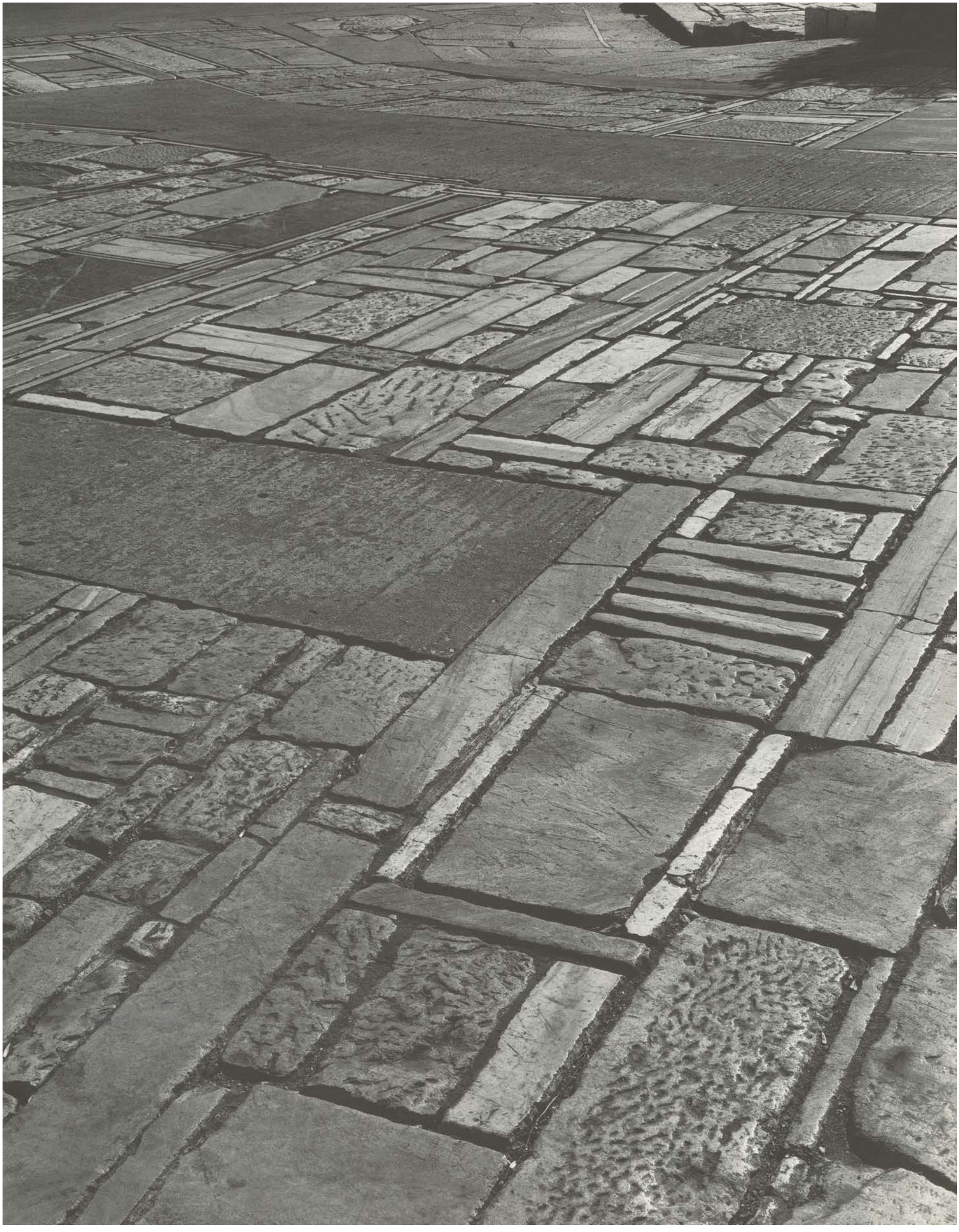


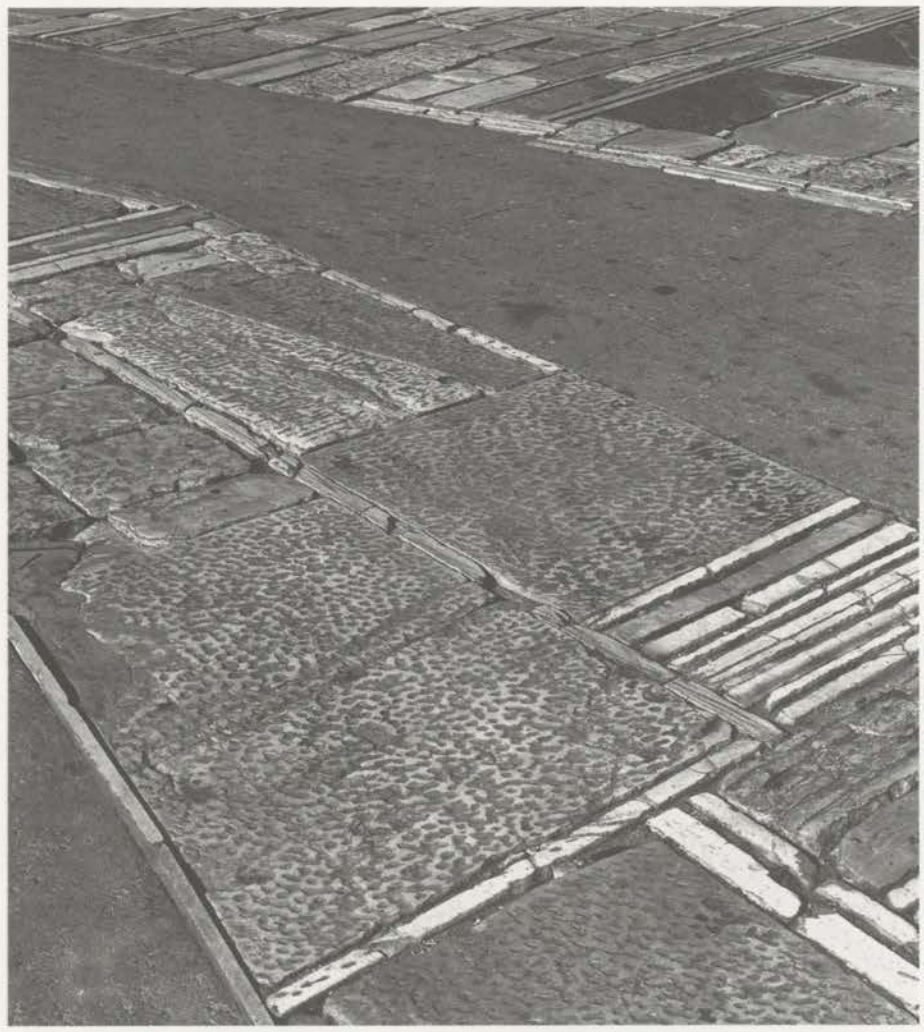
... The designs on the paved pedestrian walks are inexhaustible, inventive and universal. Squares, circles, triangles, fish, a child, another child, a woman, the sun, the waves of the sea, tridents, the spiralling wind of the prairie, a flower, another flower, the ruins of an ancient city, the letter A, letter O – a whole range of symbols and metaphysical concepts are composed with stones, tiles and little pieces of gravel.

Pikionis placed each *stone himself. He moved each stone around innumerable times until he was satisfied. It is well known that he was at the immense construction site every day, and that he laid all of the stones of the pedestrian walks himself...*

The simplicity of the total composition, the accurate exploitation of the view, the use of materials, the integration of built-up elements with the plant life, and finally the treatment of every detail make it unique. The viewer may also be captivated by the endless sequence of the designs in the walls of the church of St Dimitris. There again the same spirit prevails: poems with stones through the language of symbols and metaphysics.

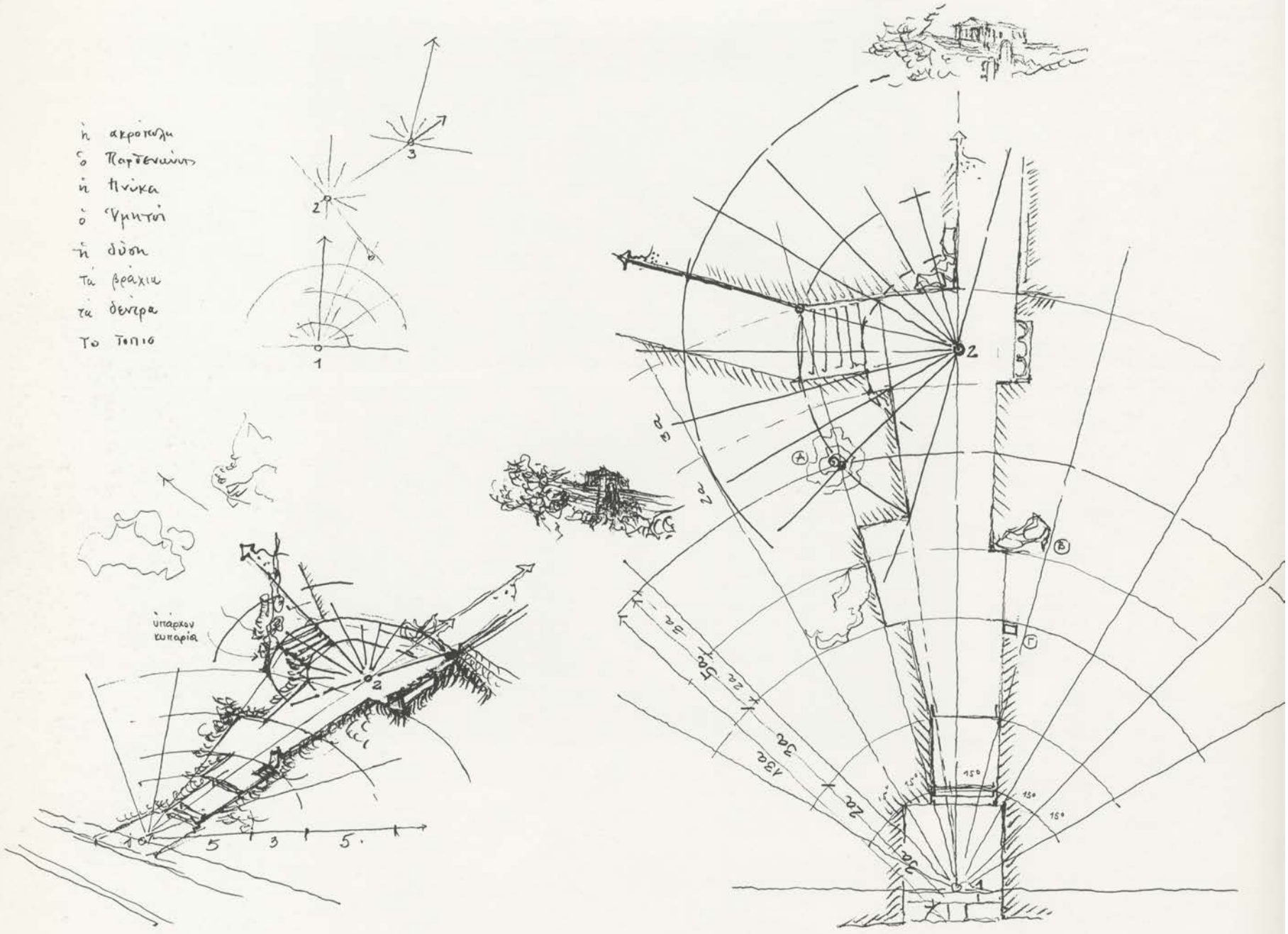
Anthony C. Antoniades





...The vegetation alongside the motor road is larger than that along the pedestrian walks. Cypress, pine and olive trees contrast with thyme and numerous native shrubs... Along the pedestrian walks, the scale of the elements used and the texture of the materials change. The walks become narrower, the slope of the hill is marked by frequent steps and the fatigue caused by the uphill trek is relieved by appropriately located seating arrangements which demonstrate an integration of stones with shrubs, benches with tree trunks... The paving designs of the walks become frequent and diverse in order to help man on his way. Pikionis, himself a keen walker, was aware that when people walk on hilly terrains they glance mostly at the ground, rather than up, and he used this opportunity to entertain the spirit.

Anthony C. Antoniades



DIMITRIS ANTONAKAKIS

Pikionis, at the site of the church of St Dimitris Loumbardiaris, has attempted to apply Doxiadis' theory of structuring space.

Along the route up the Philopappou Hill he has marked out a succession of 'critical' points where extended views are possible. The view of the Acropolis is framed by a cypress tree (A) which also gives a particular character to that part of the route.

The distance (1A) is divided according to the Golden Section into segments of 3:5 and 8:13. Circular segments are drawn on the ground using the focal point (1) as their centres, creating a viewing segment of thirty degrees and then gridded up. At the points of intersection (B) objects are positioned — rocks, pieces of marble, plant material. Sometimes, too, the boundary of the route is widened or narrowed at these intersections.

The marking out of the route is finally established after endless trials to discover what the particularities of each of the locations offer when combined with his geometrical ordering preference.

In the example sketched (moving from points 1 to 2 to 3) the entire route is derived from a series of overlaid grids offering the various possibilities and combinations eventually selected on the spot by Pikionis himself.

THALIS ARGYROPOLOUS

Although Thessalonica was the second city of the Byzantine Empire, Greece is a country without a tradition of urban architecture. However the peasants have produced charming things on a local scale. Pikionis, as part of a growing sense of national identity in the twenties, rediscovered the subleties and beauty of this vernacular architecture and later attempted to capture its essence in his own buildings. For example, if you visit a small Greek island village you will find picturesque routes which tie the working parts and the landscape together into an organic whole. It is my impression that this is precisely what Pikionis tried to do in the route up to the Acropolis and the nearby Philopappou Hill — with great skill and understanding as compared the feeble picturesque compositions of many latter-day architects.

Although he built several good houses, Pikionis never had the opportunity to design anything comprehensive on an urban scale, with the exception of a large housing project at Aixoni near Athens airport. This was excellent in that it attempted to create an urban setting for the residents, but unfortunately only a very small part of it was built. Hence, in spite of his great reputation in Greece, there are few who have worked under his spirit, except perhaps a younger architect, Konstantinides, who developed a style of his own based on close observation of the construction and spatial organization of local domestic architecture. Perhaps one could piece together as a point of view on Greek architecture the work of Pikionis, Konstantinides, and the younger Dimitris Antonakakis and his wife Susana, whose detailing and use of materials is contemporary but whose mode of organization stems from the Pikionis tradition.

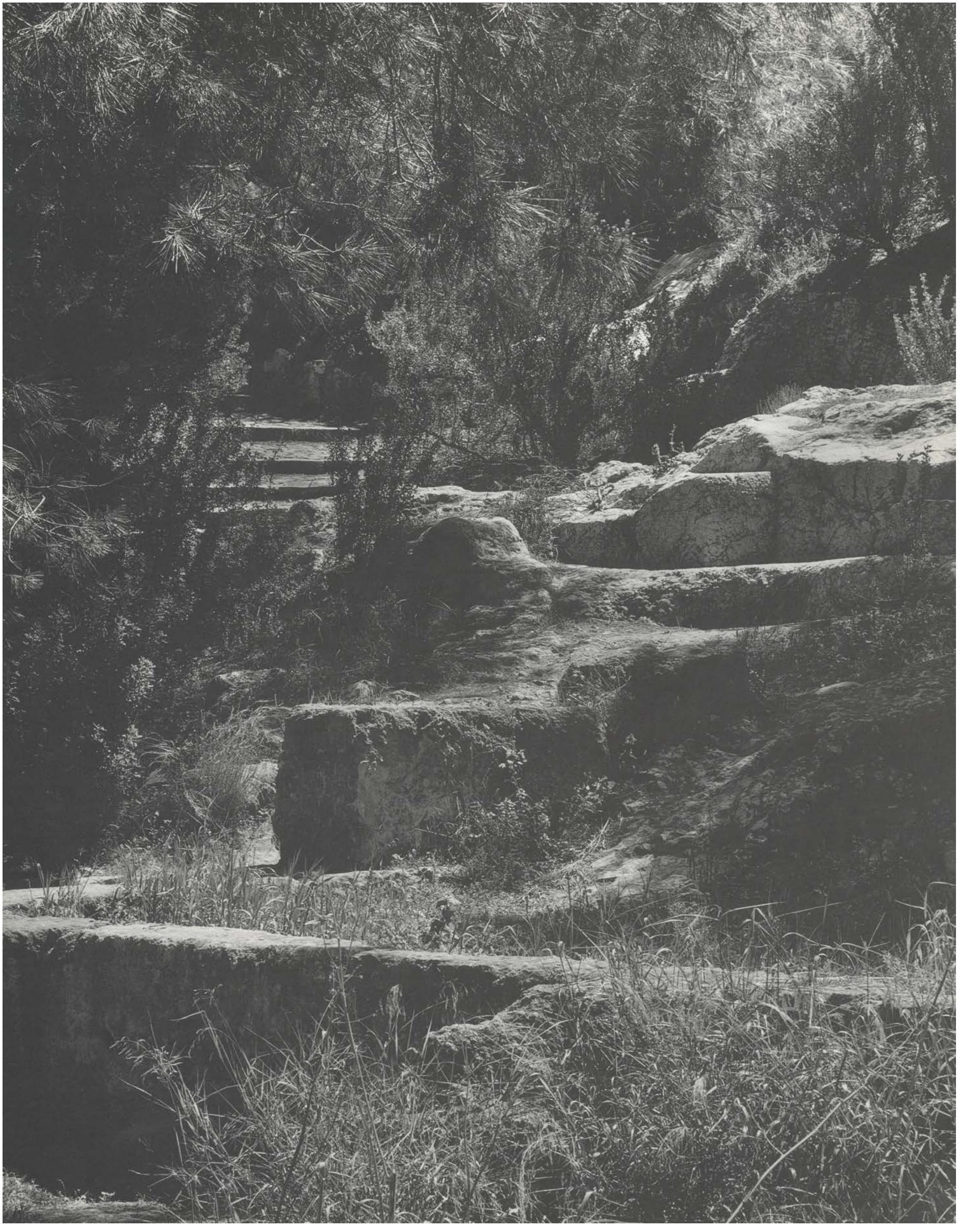
I was Pikionis' assistant at the University of Athens where he was Professor of Interior Architecture. As a teacher, he was unique. Pikionis was capable of expressing himself in a beautiful and compelling manner. Greeks are very egocentric in many ways and take great pride in their country. He made us feel as though we were within the continuity of Greek architecture from the Hellenic period onwards. Pikionis helped start a magazine called the *Third Eye.* It had an interesting cultural role, introducing many of the Modern masters — Apollinaire, Klee, Kandinsky, as well as surrealist notions about primitive art, cosmic and other harmonic geometries and proportional systems. It did not, however, have a cutting edge and its impact was only general.

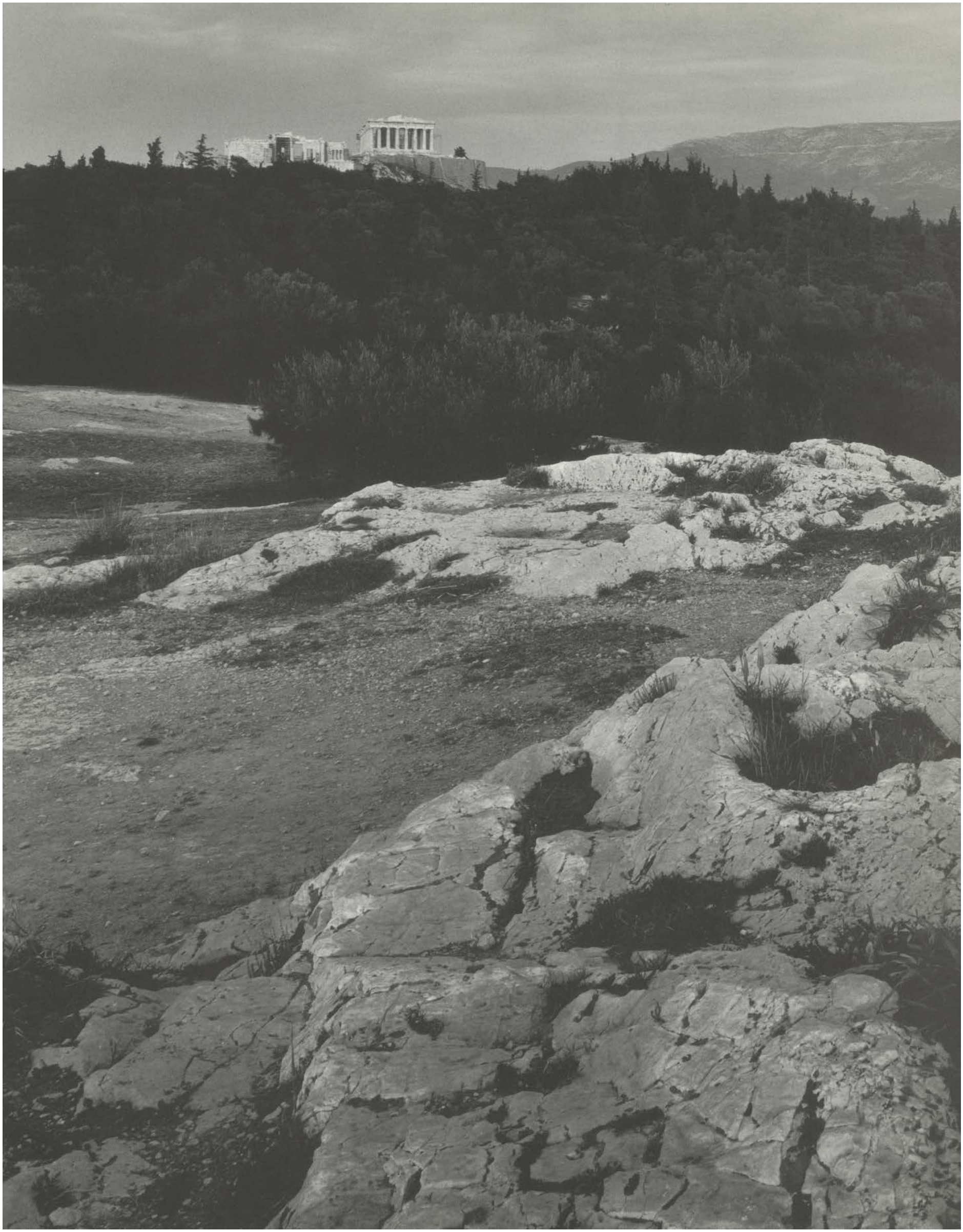
I worked with him on the landscaping around the Acropolis and Philopappou Hill. Drawings were just to start him thinking and were about general matters. As soon as things were clear in his mind he neglected them and they were never finished. Of course, out in nature, climbing steep hills with piles of stones and cheap day labour, it is hard to make final plans. However he did organize converging sight-lines and located stones, benches and openings in the landscape accordingly. Ultimately, in order to lay a complex path up a hillside, it has to be done a bit at a time, hence the fascination with detail, the character of the stone, the local conditions, the root of a tree and so on. However, in my view, too much detail without hierarchy and recognition of the larger scale is wrong. The Acropolis was fixed and Pikionis' job was to serve it. All his work was in emulation of the ambiance of the Greek village. You cannot really do that in a country at a time when it is developing from a rural to an urban society. Urbanity is a word that does not exist in the Greek language, alas.

Extracted from a conversation at the Architectural Association, 5 May 1989

... The ancient Greeks were masters in this respect as in so many others. Up on the Acropolis, it never occurred to them to interfere with the terrain's rich repository of aesthetic feeling. The Parthenon rises out of the rock; the first step of its stylobate is hewn directly into the rock. This is how the passage *from nature into art is effected. Breaking up lifeless rectilinearity with the* tension *of the curve, delicately and judiciously balanced, art carries over and embodies in its works the plasticity of nature.*

Dimitris Pikionis





CHRONOLOGY

1887
Born in Piraeus in June.

-1903
Primary and secondary education in Piraeus.

1904-08
Studies civil engineering at Athens Polytechnic, where he befriends Giorgio de Chirico and other painters.

1906
Meets Parthenis, who schools him in painting.

1908
Goes to Munich to study painting.

1909-12
On seeing some work by Cézanne, Pikionis leaves Munich for Paris. When funds become scarce, he is forced to search for a different career and begins his architectural training in the atelier of Chifflot. However he still continues to paint and maintains his friendship with De Chirico.

1912
Returns to Athens in February.

1912-21
Serves in the Greek army.

1921
Appointed lecturer at Athens Polytechnic.

1921-3
Moraitis House, Athens. First executed work.

1923
Graduates in drawing and ornamentation from the School of Fine Arts, Athens.

1925
Appointed associate professor in Interior Design at Athens Polytechnic. Publishes first written work, 'Our Folk Art and Ourselves', for *Filiki Etereia*.

Karamanos House, Patissia, Athens. No longer extant.

1926
Boarding school, Aegina. Project (with E. Kriezis).

1927
Marries Alexandra Anastasion, with whom he has two daughters and three sons.

Church of St Anagyron, Nea Ionia, Athens. Project (with E. Kriezis).

Papaloukas House, Halepa Square, Athens. No longer extant.

1928
Karayannis House, Athens. Much altered.

1930
Made full professor at Athens Polytechnic.

Papayonnos House, Markora Street, Athens. No longer extant.

1932
Elementary school, Lycabettus Hill, Athens. Still in use, although partially altered and in bad repair.

1933
Open air theatre, Heyden Street, Athens. No longer extant. Pikionis also designed stage sets for several productions at the theatre over the following years.

1934
Delphi cultural estate. Project (with the poet Anghelos Sikelianos).

Tombstones for Gounarakis, Pavlis and his cousin Porphyras.

1935
Experimental school, Thessalonica.

1935-7
Publishes the *Third Eye* journal of art and architectural theory with a group of painters: S. Doukas, S. Karantinos, Sp. Papaloukas, N. Hatzikyriakos-Gika.

1936
Apartment building, Heyden Street, Athens (ground-plan by Nikos Mitsakis). No longer extant.

1937-40
Leads study trips to Zagora and Kastoria in Western Macedonia on behalf of the Society of Greek Vernacular Art.

1938
Folk arts pavilion, Neo Phaliron, Athens. Project.

1946-7
Prototype housing, Piraeus and Lamia. Projects undertaken as head of the architectural team of the Ministry for Reconstruction, Athens.

1948-9
Two folios recording the photographs, sketches and measured drawings made by Pikionis' study groups in Western Macedonia are published by the Society of Greek Vernacular Art.

1949
Studio house for the sculptress Phrosso Efthimiades, Grypari Street, Patissia, Athens.

1950-4
Aixoni prototype housing (with A. Papageorgiou). Only a small part of the scheme was built, and this was later demolished.

1951-4
Xenia Hotel, Delphi (with A. Papageorgiou).

1951-7
Landscaping for the Acropolis and Philopappou Hill, Athens.

St Dimitris Loumbardiaris, Athens (with A. Papageorgiou). Renovation of an existing church and construction of a new pavilion as part of the landscaping of Philopappou Hill.

1953
Prototype housing, Thessalonica (with I. Papageorgiou). Built but much altered during construction.

Pourris House, Maroussi.

1954
Potamianos House, Niovis Street, Philothei, Athens (with A. and I. Papageorgiou).

1957
Ill health forces Pikionis to resign from his post at Athens Polytechnic.

1960
Fortetzas tourist development, Crete. Project.

1960-5
Children's playground, Philothei, Athens.

1961
Elected member of the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich.

1964
Landscaping of St John the Russian Church, Eubea. Project.

1965
Elected member of the Academy of Athens.

1967
Spends eight months touring the United States.

1968
Died in Athens on August 28th.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

WORKS WRITTEN BY PIKIONIS

A selection of Pikionis' most important writings has been published in Greek in a single volume, *Keimena* (Texts), edited by Agnis Pikionis and Michalis Parousis, Athens, 1985.

ARTICLES ON PIKONIS

Zygos, Athens, special issue January/February 1958.

D. Holden, 'Virtue and Form', *Guardian*, London, 22 August 1963.

N. Kurokawa, 'Architecture of the Road', *Ekistics*, Athens, November 1963.

A. Provelegios, 'The New Academician: Dimitris Pikionis', *Nea estia*, Athens, 1 June 1966.

N. Moutsopoulos, 'An Unknown Work of Pikionis', *Icones*, Athens, 26 August 1966.

Fr. Loyer, 'L'Architecture en Grèce', *SADG*, Paris, 2 July 1967.

A. Papageorgiou, 'Kinderspielplatz: Garten in Filothei bei Athen', *Bauwelt*, Berlin, 1 July 1968.

J. Liapis, 'Homage to Dimitris Pikionis', *Architecture in Greece Annual Review*, Athens, 1969.

'The Life and Work of Pikionis', *Architektoniki*, Athens, September/October 1970.

A. C. Antoniades, 'Dimitris Pikionis: His Work Lies Underfoot on Athens' Hills', *Landscape Architecture*, Louisville, March 1977.

D. A. Fatouros, 'Pikionis: Architecture as a Way of Life', *To vima*, Athens, 14 February 1979.

'De nieuwe grieken', special issue of *Wonen-TA/BK* including articles by E. Chlimintzas and G. Candilis, Amsterdam, October 1981.

C. Zwinkels, 'Ruime Belangstelling in Delft vor Grieks Architect', *De Architect*, The Hague, January 1982.

A. Dimitracopoulos, 'Dimitris Pikionis (1887-1968): Pioneer Greek Modernist', *Architectural Association Quarterly*, London, January-June 1982. Article based on Diploma dissertation submitted to the Architectural Association School in 1981.

E. Chlimintzas, 'Pikionis Built a Way of Thinking', *Forum voor architectuur*, Hilversum, June 1982.

Yorgos Simeoforidis, 'A Flavour of Modernity in Greek Architecture', *International Architect*, London, August 1982.

A. Papageorgiou, 'Pikionis and His Work', unpublished thesis submitted to Rhode Island School of Design, Department of Architecture, December 1982.

A. Pikionis, 'On the Life, Work and Thoughts of Dimitris Pikionis', *A + U*, Tokyo, September 1986.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

D. Pikionis 1887-1968: Routes and Encounters (Greek text), Athens, November 1987.

554/19-28
530,-

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication has been produced to accompany an exhibition of original drawings, paintings and photographs of the work of Dimitris Pikionis held at the Architectural Association from 6 June to 4 July 1989. The exhibition dates coincide with the Greek Festival in London.

Both exhibition and publication have been arranged through the office of the Chairman, Alvin Boyarsky, assisted by Micki Hawkes.

The publication *Mega XI, Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968: A Sentimental Topography* has been produced for AA Publications by Pamela Johnston (production editor) and Dennis Crompton (technical co-ordinator) with Annie Bridges, Dominique Murray, Stuart Smith, Marilyn Sparrow and Mark Vernon-Jones. Exhibition co-ordinator: Caroline O'Hanrahan.

Translation from the Greek of Dimitris Pikionis' 'A Sentimental Topography' and 'Autobiographical Notes' by Kay Cicellis; translation into Greek of Ken Frampton's 'For Dimitris Pikionis' by Iliona Outram and Yorgos Simeoforidis.

Special photography for this publication by: Hélène Binet, assisted by Laure Thorel 7, 44, 45, 46 (bottom left), 48, 49, 51 top, 53 bottom, 59 bottom right, 60 bottom, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96-7; Emile Chlimintzas 40, 41 bottom, 43; Peter Smithson 65. The illustrations on the following pages have been reproduced from: Roloff Beny, *Zeit der Götter* 16-17; H. Bossert, *Griechenland* 10, 11, 12, 13, 25 top; Commercial Bank of Greece, *Neo-Classical Architecture in Greece* 14, 15.

All other material for this publication has been loaned and reproduced with kind permission of Agnis Pikionis. Additional photography of drawings by Geremy Butler and Paul Barnett.

Quotations on the following pages appeared first in: William Alex, *Japanese Architecture* 79; Anthony C. Antoniades, *Landscape Architecture* 86, 89; Emile Chlimintzas, *Forum voor architectuur* 27, 31, 40-1, 42, 59-60; Alexandra Papageorgiou, 'Pikionis and his Work', thesis submitted to Rhode Island School of Design 22, 57, 82.

In addition, the Architectural Association is particularly grateful to the following for their advice and assistance: Agnis Pikionis, Ken Frampton, Yorgos Simeoforidis, Frosso Pimenides, Thalis Argyropoulos, Athansios Spanomaridis, Phrosso Efthimiades-Menegaki, Yannis Zachariades, Katarina Panagiotou, Zoe Zenghelis and the organizer of the Greek Festival in London, Guy Protheroe.

Origination by Target Litho
Printed by E. G. Bond Limited
Cover silkscreened by Positive Screen Printers

ISBN 1 870890 18 3
©1989 The Architectural Association
36 Bedford Square, London WC1